

Teleglobe Canada

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add some further comments to the amendment moved by the Hon. Member for Humber—Port au Port—St. Barbe (Mr. Tobin). His amendment deals with a very specific and important anomaly, in fact, an important omission by the Government in dealing with the rights of the employees of Teleglobe. As other commentators have pointed out, the amendment raises broader questions about the purpose and objective of the Government in bringing about privatization.

The most disturbing aspect of the privatization movement of the Government is that it is not related to any policy other than the recovery of funds for the Government. It is not related to a policy dealing with telecommunications or transportation or to trying to put together an economic agenda which seems to make sense with regard to how we should develop the regions and the country and how we should develop better relations between workers and employers.

Privatization can be legitimate if it can be proven that the operation of an industry in the private sector is a more effective way of achieving goals than having it under government ownership. However, the only rationale we are given by various spokespersons for privatizing existing Crown corporations is that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) wants to make a money grab to pay the bills. We are selling off companies simply to acquire funds to help the Minister of Finance reduce his deficit or meet some other obligation which he thinks is important.

As a result, there is no rationale, *raison d'être*, blueprint, or form of useful framework to analyse why we are doing this. No one has yet explained to anyone's satisfaction why Teleglobe will be a superior instrument in the private sector to what it is in the public sector for the pursuit of Canadian objectives in the area of telecommunications.

● (1140)

I have read the Minister's speech and other commentary but one cannot find enough wit in the Conservative mentality to give even some explanation of how this measure will assist the growth of telecommunications in this country. While everyone recognizes the limitation of the Conservative mentality by now, one would have thought that there would be some appropriate rationalization behind this move. However, it is simply a money grab to fatten the consolidated revenue and it has nothing to do with telecommunications.

This is most evident when we look at the treatment of the current employees of Teleglobe. One of the primary responsibilities of any company, public or private, is to ensure that the employees are properly treated when there is a major dislocation. They have a responsibility to ensure that employees are not the victims of that change, or treated in a cursory or arbitrary way.

One would have thought that the federal Government would try to provide a model of how to deal with employees properly

and effectively and would have made an effort to set a standard of responsibility and fairness to be applied to other companies, rather than simply attempting to chisel and niggle away a few extra dollars. The Government is miserly in trying to short-change its own employees while carrying out a policy that has no purpose. The Government is deliberately ignoring the necessary consideration it must have to form a proper relationship with its workers, and is even taking the further step of overturning previous standards that have been set in the allocation of pension benefits.

The purpose of the amendment moved by my colleague is to rectify a very clear mistake by the Government. It also attempts to point out that the Government, in pursuing its privatization plan, must be required to do so in a far more legitimate, effective and humane way.

We will not be able to correct the program at least for another 18 months or two years until we are back in power to do things properly, so we believe that it is at least important to point out how the Government can proceed without treating its employees in this shabby way.

I suggest that Conservative Members, especially those who represent public employees in their ridings, should demonstrate some sensitivity to this matter.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa—Carleton): We are always sensitive.

Mr. Axworthy: They should at least show some responsibility to their constituents. Perhaps they have become so inured to the kind of insensitivity that characterizes the Government—

Mr. Turner (Ottawa—Carleton): Baloney!

Mr. Axworthy: —that they have lost that capacity for sensitivity. I see certain Members in the House who represent Ottawa constituencies. They know, perhaps more than anyone, how this Teleglobe Bill is a transgression of public service rights. Therefore, one would think that they should be compelled by a sense of conscience and obligation to convince the Minister that there is no shame in admitting a mistake and accepting an amendment when it is legitimate and workable. So far, there has been no such indication on the part of those Members, and certainly no interest on the part of the Minister to respond to such representations.

We can only conclude that they do not care and are unwilling to use Parliament as a way of debating issues, exposing legislation to public scrutiny, and having the ability and wisdom to correct mistakes. It is the only Government I have seen that is somehow congenitally unable to make amendments to its own legislation. Perhaps it believes it has inherited a divine right, but that is not how this institution is supposed to work. That is not how it has worked in the past because there has always been a willingness to accept amendments and change legislation.

Mr. Lewis: I remember when Pierre did it all the time.