

Government Orders

offering of non-voting shares is a very empty gesture indeed.

• (1110)

When we talk about privatization let us all recall very carefully a statement by the right hon. Prime Minister when he indicated to the past president of the Quebec Federation of Labour, Mr. Louis Laberge, that Air Canada was not for sale. This was quoted widely in the press because at that time many of us in opposition were saying that we thought the government was going to begin to privatize Air Canada. The Prime Minister went on record and said: "Here is my word. I am saying to the president of the Quebec Federation of Labour once and for all, for all Canadians to hear, that Air Canada is not for sale". That was the quote. It was headlined from coast to coast to coast. We could trust the Prime Minister; he had stated it very clearly.

Mr. Boudria: Did you say "trust the Prime Minister"?

Mr. Riis: Members are questioning whether I was quoting the Prime Minister. Yes, I was. Having said that, within a very short period of time the government began to sell off part of Air Canada. It began to privatize Air Canada.

Mr. Langlois: No. The stock of the company was sold, not the company itself. The assets of the company were not sold. There is a difference.

Mr. Riis: My friend opposite says: "No". The stocks of the company were sold to the private sector. We can quibble over just what it was, but I think the Prime Minister was trying to say: "If I was going to tell the truth here, I would say that Air Canada would not be privatized". That process has begun. The government has said regardless of what its Prime Minister says that it is going to do something totally different. It is fair to say that the government record on privatization speaks for itself.

We have heard time and time again—and I am diverting my thinking to the free trade discussions—the Prime Minister saying that social programs would not be touched, that they were a sacred trust. I guess he was also referring to things like the family allowance. It was a sacred trust. The family allowance would never be touched, he virtually was saying. What did the government do? It totally abandoned family allowance. Family allowance does not exist today. We cannot have a sacred trust and the next day completely abandon the program.

It is that kind of hypocrisy we have encountered on a regular basis in this government. Regardless of what anyone says, people are reluctant to have faith in those comments.

I have to acknowledge that the member from Calgary, the present minister responsible for the post office, speaks out from time to time and speaks very truthfully. He had the courage to say it was his hope the government would privatize the post office of Canada. He said that, and I think we have to respect his words because he does tend to speak very forcefully. We can assume the government will certainly plan to follow through on what he says.

On another matter, I wanted to indicate why my party and I oppose the legislation. It is the suggestion that this will bring labour-management peace. The minister responsible for the post office indicates that Bill C-73 is designed only to make Canada Post employees feel proud to be part of Canada Post.

Let us look at the record. As we speak today there are over 100,000 grievances at Canada Post and there are not even 100,000 employees at Canada Post. This means there are more grievances than the number of people working at the postal corporation. Anyone who knows anything about labour-management relations would indicate that this is probably the best barometer of harmonious things within a particular corporation, the number of outstanding grievances. This record is almost unbelievable.

As a matter of fact if we do the calculation it works out to almost two grievances for every employee. It is ridiculous, to say the least. For the minister responsible for the post office to assume that offering a 10 per cent share of the company—and recognizing that they are non-voting shares—would somehow make the atmosphere of resentment disappear is absolute and total folly.

• (1115)

We need only look at the most recent postal strike as a good example. Although CUPW publicly made a commitment to ensure that government cheques would be gladly delivered by its members during the work stoppage, Canada Post refused to ensure that CUPW would not score popularity points. Instead, as we all remember, seniors and the disabled were forced to stand outside for hours at postal distribution outlets to get their cheques.