

Government Orders

The way it is proposing it is quite bizarre because it is going to allow the sale of up to 10 per cent of the shares, none of which will have votes, and the government will retain 90 per cent of the shares, the only voting shares. Therefore, the government in effect will control this corporation, at the same time allowing some ownership by others in the corporation.

I want to make perfectly clear what is being foisted on the Canadian public here. The government speaks about Canada Post as though it were something different from the government. It is 100 per cent government owned. It is just like another government department except it has a board of directors and operates something close to arm's length from the government, although one does not know how close that is unless one is in government.

Assuming it is at arm's length, here is a corporation wholly owned by the government carrying on business in Canada with one very important power that other corporations do not have; namely, a monopoly on the right to distribute mail in Canada. With that right goes a right to apply to the government and the government has the power to increase postal rates and to charge for the service it provides.

In other words, there is no commission like the CRTC to oversee its rates. There is no other body that can control those rates except the Government of Canada. Even the House of Commons has lost its control over the rate increases imposed by Canada Post.

My recollection was that in the old days when Canada Post wanted to raise rates it had to come to Parliament and it was an act of Parliament that dealt with the issue. Now that it is no longer a government department that process is gone. Therefore, as parliamentarians we have no control over the rates of Canada Post except for possibly the government caucus which, if it would flex its muscles once in a while and tell the cabinet what to do, could tell the cabinet not to approve another rate increase and Canada Post would not get a rate increase.

Rate increases at Canada Post are nothing more than a tax on Canadians. You would think to hear the minister speak that a rate increase is just a cost of doing business. It is nothing more than a tax because if the rate increase makes profit for the government it reduces the general tax burden on the rest of us, and if it does not then we increase the general tax burden.

Postal rates are in effect a tax.

An hon. member: It charges the GST as well.

Mr. Milliken: It charges the GST as well. It is a tax on a tax. If the post office were still a government department it would have a little more trouble justifying charging the GST on postage rates. I am glad my colleague from Montreal reminded me of this fact. It is an important one. Canadians are paying a tax on a tax when they buy postage stamps or pay for postage. They are being bled white by this government and its Draconian policies. Now to make it look as though it is softening the blow, the government is proposing to privatize Canada Post and put it up for sale, at least in a limited way, to some undefined members of the public.

This bill should not be proceeded with. The fact is Canadians are sick and tired of the way Canada Post is being run by this government and privatization of it is not going to make it any better. The fear is that it will make it worse.

Supermailboxes have been a cause of real concern. People living in new subdivisions cannot get door to door mail delivery. They get their mail from a supermailbox. I get constant complaints in my constituency office from the electors of Kingston and the Islands who are served by supermailboxes. The supermailboxes freeze up in winter. These people are unable to get the keys into the locks because they are jammed up with ice. They are unable to get access to the boxes when it is too cold because they will not open properly. In terrible weather senior citizens in my riding who live in these subdivisions served by supermailboxes are forced to walk in treacherous conditions to the supermailbox to get their mail. They are not paid to do that. Post office employees who deliver the mail are.

If the mail were delivered to homes the way it is in other parts of the riding that are not so new, we would not have this double standard, this second-class service, that some people are forced to endure because of the changes in policy of Canada Post brought about as a direct result of this government's policies.

The minister responsible for Canada Post in this House, the government House leader, and all his colleagues have flown. Here we are discussing a government bill and not one of them is here to listen to the criticisms of the bill and they have put closure on the debate. It shows a complete unwillingness to listen to the views of Canadians who are appalled by the government's actions.