

Government Orders

what its intentions are. We suspect that in this bill it is another case of one small step to another hidden agenda.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mark Assad (Gatineau—La Lièvre): Mr. Speaker, most members of this House have of course spoken against this bill, but some have come out in favour of it. Since 1965 the general public has lived through 18 major disputes at Canada Post. We have had some very difficult years and as yet a way has not been found to ensure peace in a postal system which at one time was the envy of the world. Canadians do not know that there is a very long history behind Canada Post.

Even before the country was formed in 1867, in the colonies of New France in the 16th century, to go way back, the French saw that the Indians, the native people, the Iroquois and so on, had a system to take messages by river with canoes made of bark. They found their methods very effective, considering the difficulties at that time when all the land was covered with forests. The French at the time of New France adopted this method using canoes of bark to send documents between Quebec City and Montreal mainly, or to Trois-Rivières, depending on the colonies.

In 1735 they decided that official documents could be sent not only by water but also by land through the forests and roads were laid out over time. Strangely for the time, 1735, the first person hired to take messages, if you want, was a Portuguese fellow by the name of Pedro da Silva, as history records. So we can see that everyone was an immigrant even then, because countries other than France and England were also represented in this country. Over the years, the system improved. In 1868, just a few months after Confederation in 1867 when Canada became a country, one of the first departments created was the post office. Post houses were created which over time became post offices headed by postmasters.

• (1615)

With the advent of airplanes, a system developed in the country. We must not forget that Canada's population was not large but we then had a service considered very advanced and rapid, given the small population and the large territory to be crossed to deliver mail throughout the country. I even noticed that in the 1920s mail was

free in some rural areas. That is far from the case today. At the time, although people were poor, they could communicate by mail with relatives outside their region.

The first stamps came in the 1800s. It is not surprising that the beaver appeared on the first stamp, which cost three cents. For the time, perhaps it was a lot of money compared to what it costs today.

On the whole, Canadians had a very good system, but unfortunately it was not possible to solve the conflicts in Canada Post. Since 1965, there have been 18 conflicts. I believe they have destroyed morale at Canada Post. Later, we had great difficulty establishing a system with which Canada Post employees were satisfied. Many attempts were made with various government plans to find a solution.

Finally, we have Bill C-73, which is rather vague in that it would privatize the postal system. We suspected it for some time, but the government denied it. What I find hard to understand is that it recognizes that the employees, the postal workers, are the most important part of the system. In spite of that, the government plans to sell them 10 per cent of our system, only 10 per cent—of course, the government would keep 90 per cent—but with no voting rights. Usually, shareholders have voting rights, but not in this case.

The government thinks that privatizing the postal system could solve the strikes and conflicts at Canada Post, but I think it misunderstands the problem. For many years Canada Post has needed a kind of leadership that would not necessarily come from the government and its appointees. It should have invested in that and found the leadership needed to rebuild the necessary morale, but that is not what it did. A conflict situation has been created and has gone on without interruption for the past 25 years.

This bill does not really solve the problems. Instead, they should have found what was creating a situation in Canada Post that always led to conflict. We can honestly say that Canada Post pays well. They are not the highest paid workers, but they are certainly not the lowest paid. Paying well is not always a way to buy peace. In spite of that, they complained that the corporate leadership was uncaring and they felt that they were treated cavalierly.