

Government Orders

Mr. Lyle Kristiansen (Kootenay West—Revelstoke): Mr. Speaker, in dealing with the bill before us today, the proposed government changes to the Canada Post Corporation, I could not help but let my mind drift back to a session in this House a number of years ago when Canada Post Corporation was first created out of the mess that was the post office department before that time.

If we cast our minds back to 1977 and 1978 there was one industrial dispute after another that took place within the Canadian post office, one strike after another. The grievances had piled up—there were 50,000 or 100,000—and everybody, labour, management, public, and government, recognized that something had to be done.

• (1145)

While it pains me to say something exceedingly positive about a former government formed by a party of which I am not a member, one of the things that the late Bryce Mackasey and his colleagues in government did, after a lot of urging from the public, the New Democratic Party, organized labour and others concerned with creating an efficient and competent post office in Canada, was to enact the Canada Post Corporation Act. In doing so they made a number of important changes and also introduced some mechanisms, such as having representatives of employees—although appointed indirectly, which I think is the correct route to go in any case—from the labour movement and from employees within the post office.

At that time Robert McGarry, who was the president of the Letter Carrier's Union, and Ron Lang from the Canadian Labour Congress became two board members of the Canada Post Corporation. The first president of that corporation, Michael Warren, also introduced a new day, a new efficiency and a new spirit of co-operation into the postal system in Canada.

Mr. Warren was pretty smooth. Some people were a little suspicious of him because he was perhaps a little too smooth in their perception. He was competent. He took the public into his confidence. He took key people within the labour movement into his confidence and he dealt closely and on a regular basis with members of Parliament who were interested in the Canada Post Corporation from all parties. He, that board of directors, and that new Crown corporation did wonders in turning

what was portrayed as one of the worst messes in Canada into a relatively efficient and competent corporation.

In the early 1980s I was postal critic for my party and I can remember enjoying the fact that I had something good to say about something that was happening with government and with public administration in Canada. As I mentioned earlier, there were 50,000 or 100,000 grievances sitting around stewing and poisoning the whole labour-management situation within Canada Post and across the country. Within a period of about two years that pile of unresolved grievances had been reduced to virtually nil. We went for a number of years without a single major industrial dispute. Deliveries that used to take two weeks from coast to coast now were delivered in a two-day period, deliveries from Vancouver to Toronto or Ottawa to Vancouver. Sometimes a delivery from Ottawa to Vancouver up to the interior of British Columbia only takes two days.

It did not always happen but that became the standard, and it was by and large met. Despite the proclivity of many Canadians, because we love to knock the post office as do people all over the world, a grudging admiration began to develop among the public out there and among people of all parties. They began to say that government could do something right.

Then this government with its agenda of privatization and a real wrecking crew went to work, destabilized the corporation, got into a real slanging match via a new president of the corporation, and I suspect the government, with the labour representatives on the corporation's board of directors. It found an excuse to knock them off, first of all by depriving them of information necessary in order to perform their function as directors of that corporation. When one of them engaged in legal action in order to get information to which he was entitled as a member of that board of directors, the government used that excuse to remove them from the board of the corporation.

• (1150)

We have come full circle to having about 100,000 grievances, undue amounts of time for mail delivery, privatization and closures in almost every rural area of Canada, and a general poisonous atmosphere once again within that corporation, particularly since the labour bashing and employee bashing tactics of the present Crown corporation and the government in the last few years. They were hiring what the government likes to call replacement workers and which most people who work