

*Government Orders*

We understand what those promises mean. The Prime Minister made a famous promise to maintain unemployment insurance without change or reduction. Yet immediately after the last election he reneged on that promise and slashed unemployment insurance, destroying a program that had existed in this country for nearly half a century and on which working people depend.

If we will just believe the Prime Minister and the minister in charge of the post office until the next election, then they will do whatever they had planned to do all along.

He admits that. He thinks they can get away with making it a joke. He said:

If I had to bet I would bet that in the next couple of decades you will see post offices being privatized all over the world and I would not mind seeing Canada first.

That is like the famous boast of the Prime Minister when he said: "Give us 20 years and you will not recognize Canada". He has not even taken 20 years to destroy some of our best institutions, such as VIA Rail and Canada Post, and he has not even taken 20 years to seriously damage the health system and post-secondary education by cutting back on the federal government's commitment to share in those costs.

It could well be that selling these shares to some willing employees is an attempt to make a future private industry profit-oriented buyer more willing to buy Canada Post with the idea that the employees are tame. There are some gold star receiving employees who will do whatever they are asked to do and will not ask to have a union. Right now they have a union but the union has no contract. Perhaps Canada Post is waiting not just for the next election but for the final destruction and disappearance of all unions within Canada Post's jurisdiction in order to make it easier to sell.

The fact that it likes to remove Canadian emblems from visibility on Canada Post property certainly encourages the suggestion that the buyer that the government might very well prefer would be an American one, perhaps one of the American courier corporations who are already operating in Canada.

One of my colleagues said, jokingly: "Why not privatize the fire department?" As a matter of fact, it is not quite a joke. There is an historical precedent for privatizing a fire service. In ancient Rome there was a man called Marcus Crassus, an entrepreneur and a smart man, who organized a fire brigade. When a house caught

fire Crassus and his men would come on the run carrying buckets and towing a big tank of water. Crassus then would begin to negotiate with the owner of the house to buy it. If the owner thought his price was too low and began arguing with Crassus that it should be higher, then he could stand watching his house burn down while they argued about the price. If the owner finally agreed to Crassus' price, perhaps Crassus by that time had dropped his price, but if they finally agreed on his price then Crassus became the owner of the burned down house. Crassus became perhaps the largest landowner in the city of Rome in his time. He certainly became what we would call a multimillionaire, if not a billionaire.

However, I do not think that service is a model we would want to follow. Just letting private citizens' homes burn down is one thing, but if we were going to let the major buildings in the centre of Toronto or in the centre of Ottawa, or, Heaven help us, the Parliament Buildings, burn down, I do not think that the Crassus system would really be equal to the occasion. We must have certain public services that are provided by the elected representatives, with the money the elected representatives collect from the public, with whatever cost recovery is reasonable.

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In other words, the first object of a service such as the fire brigade or the post office is to provide service to the public. The first object of the post office is to deliver mail to all Canadians because all Canadians are taxpayers. It is not merely to deliver mail first to those who can pay the most for it and let the others wait or not merely to give a low-priced service in the high density areas and let the people in the country pay far higher prices on somebody's reckoning of cost benefit.

The gambit of offering these shares to the employees as a move toward privatization is a dishonest one, especially against the record of this government. I do not believe people will trust the government with that any more than they trust it now.

It is said this is supposed to give us labour-management peace. That shows a 19th century attitude. They may be talking about 20th century or 21st century technology but the brains on the government side are locked in the 19th century, when owners believed they had a right to refuse any union representation among their employees, and they often used violent methods to enforce that so-called right.