

There is a community in my riding where the post office was one of the largest rural post offices that had been closed to that date. I speak of the community of Enderby. The impact in that community would have been quite dramatic had not the community itself taken some fairly aggressive measures and successfully, I might add, convinced the powers that be at Canada Post to at least consider rather than fragmenting the service and piecemealing it off to various parts of the community to at least maintain a central facility. At least the people still have, although it is a privatized retail outlet, a facility not far from where the original post office was located that is maintaining that very vital service to the community.

I might add that not all communities in Canada have been as fortunate as Enderby to have been able to at least maintain that centralized service. There are many communities throughout Canada and other parts of the Okanagan that have been less fortunate. For example, in the community of Westwold, which is in the riding of Kamloops held by my friend and colleague from the Kamloops area, the post office was closed. It was virtually the only outlet available in the area. People fought it, there was virtual insurrection, there were mass protests and yet the government remained absolutely opposed to any thought of reorganizing that postal outlet. It closed it and the community lost a very vital service.

Not long ago to the south of me in the community of Penticton, again a community that is in the riding of one of my friends and colleagues, the member for Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt, that post office was also closed, again despite the very strong vocal protests from the many people in that community about the loss of that service.

The service was broken up, it was fragmented and was divied up piecemeal to other retail outlets. As I say, that has a very dramatic impact in those smaller communities throughout Canada. In many cases it does tend to fragment the community. As I said before, the post office is very much part and parcel of community life. It is part of the heartbeat of that community. In closing those offices, the government has done much harm to the lifestyle of rural Canadians.

Government Orders

This particular bill, as I mentioned, continues that process. The bill is supposedly to allow 10 per cent of Canada Post non-voting shares to be made available for purchase by Canada Post employees. Supposedly, according to the minister, the bill is to help eliminate the labour-management tension that currently exists at Canada Post.

I submit that that is a specious argument. The argument does not hold true to the reality of the situation faced by the employees at Canada Post and that is why we oppose the bill.

I think the argument can be made and has been made time and time again that this government's long-term agenda and this initiative falls hand in hand with its strategy of full privatization of Canada Post.

The bill will do nothing to promote labour management peace. The argument used by the minister that it will eliminate the labour-management tensions is simply a smoke-screen. It will do nothing to eliminate the problems that have existed for years at Canada Post, tensions that have developed because of poor management practices and a very poor management relationship with respect to the employees of that organization.

Canada Post has proven in the past that it cannot be trusted to stop harassing the workers. It cannot be trusted to stick to its word. This bill, I submit, does nothing to resolve that critical shortcoming in terms of the past management practices of this particular Crown corporation.

The bill does nothing to maintain or improve the service in our rural and urban postal outlets. It does nothing to address the inadequacies of what the government has proceeded with in terms of the closure of hundreds and hundreds of rural post offices across this country. It is well-known that the long-term strategy of this government is to close down virtually every rural outlet in Canada, to take that service and piecemeal it off into the retail sector.

I submit part of that strategy is simply a way of getting around the difficulties that this management structure has found in giving a fair deal to the workers and the union involved. It is much easier just to go around it, privatize it, and then it does not have to deal with the realities of union-labour and union-management negotiations.