

occasions I have asked the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston) whether the government has the intention of introducing a Crown corporations bill which would be an omnibus bill similar to the one introduced by the Clark government.

On several occasions he promised that would be done. However, well over a year after having been sworn in as minister, we have yet to see any tangible evidence whatsoever of seriousness on the part of the government or an interest in bringing in the omnibus Crown corporation legislation.

When we put questions to the Postmaster General (Mr. Ouellet) in committee and at other times with regard to odious provisions in the Crown corporation bill for the Post Office which fly in the face and are directly contrary to the policy adopted in the Crown corporations omnibus bill proposed by the Clark government, the answer was that he does not know. He does not want to pre-judge what is going to be an omnibus Crown corporations bill.

• (2150)

If ever an omnibus Crown corporation bill is brought back to Parliament, and the minister is arguing he would prefer to have things remain the way they are now, and if the omnibus bill is to be brought in later, then we can amend this Post Office Act at that time and change the provisions then.

If we are concerned about getting the Post Office off to a good start we should begin properly. We should commence by following principles which are sound business principles, which will instill confidence in the public in the Crown corporation; principles which will make it easier for members of the Post Office today to have confidence in the way in which the Crown corporation will be managed and principles which will assure the people who will be asked to sit on the board of directors of the Crown corporation that they will have a job to do and be able to do it. If we are not to start on that proper footing then how can we expect Canadians, the employees of the Post Office and the board of directors of the Post Office to have confidence in the work we have done here?

I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the Clark government had introduced legislation which was an omnibus bill, the broad principles of which members of the government have stated they support. The government says it has made no decision to overturn those principles. The onus then is on the Postmaster General, if he wishes to depart from those principles, to justify why it is desirable that the cabinet, the politicians, be able to interfere in these day-to-day business decisions of Crown corporations. Why is it desirable to undercut the board of directors? Why is it desirable to have the cabinet, in essence, hire the vice-presidents of the corporation and, in essence, set their salaries? That is what this provision would allow. If none of these decisions could be made without the approval of the governor in council it would mean this power devolves back to the cabinet instead of residing with the board of directors.

I have heard no justification from the government, certainly not from the Postmaster General, that public interest requires

Canada Post Corporation Act

that provision, which was put into the Crown corporations omnibus bill after considerable thought, after trying to respond to the concerns of the Public Accounts Committee, the Lambert Commission and the Auditor General, be struck down, and no justification for the suggestion that instead we should have a provision which would allow political patronage tinkering in the management of the Post Office.

In the absence of any such justification I think it is incumbent upon the House and the government to accept the motion I am proposing tonight. It is designed to do nothing more than ensure that the Crown corporation functions on a businesslike basis, and to ensure that the public and the employees of the Post Office have confidence in the decisions which are made in the appointment of senior executives of that corporation. The employees and the public are entitled to no less. I think the government, if it is concerned about building that kind of confidence, should be prepared to accept the motion I am proposing tonight.

Mr. John McDermid (Brampton-Georgetown): Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. At one time in this country the Post Office, Her Majesty's mail service, was one of the finest institutions in this country. Everyone was proud of their Post Office and of the service it provided to Canadians. Unfortunately, today, it bears the brunt of jokes across this land.

If the government is serious about developing the Post Office into a Crown corporation so that it provides reliable service for Canadians, of which they can once again be proud, then the question of accountability is very important. In the amendment, motion No. 3, presented by my colleague, this concept is most important. It is one at which we would take a long, hard look.

Rumours are flying around that a certain gentleman from the city of Toronto who ran the transit commission there for many years, a former deputy minister in the provincial government, will be taking over the Post Office. Speaking on my own behalf, and not as a spokesman for any party, I hope that is true because I know of this man's ability. I know he would do an excellent job. I also know he would want to run the Post Office, the Crown corporation, as a legitimate business. He would not want the political interference which could very well take place if this amendment is not accepted.

For heaven's sake, if the Post Office is to be turned into a Crown corporation then let it operate as an independent business. If the government wishes to set guidelines, that is fine. But do not ask someone of the quality of this man to come to the government in order to ask permission to hire this individual and pay him that amount of money. Let him work within the guidelines set out by the government. Let him run the corporation as a business.

The presentation made by my colleague who introduced this motion was very well stated. I want to make this point most emphatically. Accountability is probably the most important aspect of this legislation—accountability to the people. If the aspect of political appointments to senior positions within the Post Office is brought in then that accountability is completely