

Dear Mom, Dad, Jemmie, Johnny, and Debbie,

How is everything?

Things are
so good
now instead

See, it's
that money
Did you
Guess what?
Jemmie
And Debbie, is
I hear your pe
of cash up here
Well it's

Ps

Send more
money soon!

Pss

Peter says Hi!

Dear Mom

-What exactly is the "privatization of postal services"? In a very basic sense, it is the formation of a network of sub-post offices and super mail boxes which will replace many of the existing post offices found in most cities and rural areas throughout Canada. At a glance, this might not seem to be such a controversial event, nevertheless it definitely is as far as the Canada Post corporation and its workers -- the Canadian Union of Postal Workers -- are concerned.

Ironically, yet perhaps not surprisingly, employers and employees of Canada Post do not seem to be taking the same stand on the issue. CUPW has launched a "National Program of Action" known as "Struggle '88". This organization is attempting to promote the reversal of the present process which is the setting up of new post office locations in private business as well as increasing the number of super mail boxes.

George Benwell, a Canada Post representative in Halifax emphasizes that "privatization" is a word that is "not used by us. It has been coined and used by the Union only. What we are doing is using retail outlets to offer the customer a more convenient time to do business with the post office." Canada Post feels that the hours kept by most post offices today do not meet the needs of the Canadian public, composed of many people who work late hours, or cannot get to a post office until Saturday. But the CUPW claims that it has told the Canada Post corporation that its workers are willing to work for longer hours to improve service. The CUPW says that "officials at the post office and this government have tried to sway these employers into trying other counter services such as bill paying, hunting and fishing license sales, banking services in small communities where they are no more box offices, lotto ticket sales, consumer post distributing, parcel wrapping service, and on and on..."

But according to Mr. Benwell, "You can't set up a service without expertise. The manning of a counter and selling of retail products behind the counter requires more expertise and money." He indicates that this would not help to reduce the deficit; nor would it make the tax payer happy: "For us, as a Crown corporation, our job is to make sure what we do out of a different product and have this product sold in a different way."

The Union blames the continual rising cost of postage stamps on the present government, saying that it is "part of a strategy to make you (the public) dissatisfied with your service." Mr. Benwell notes that the present government hasn't even been in power for more than four years, and the rising cost of the stamp has been noticed for longer than that. His explanation is: "Why does the price of bread go up? Inflation. It's inflation. In this case, the unions want more money. It is not providing the same service."

A major concern of CUPW is what it believes to be the problem of Canadian people living in rural areas. The Union says that many seniors and disabled people have limited access to transportation to get to new privatized post offices, sub-post offices, and super mail boxes. As well, the Union feels that such additions are a "deterioration of postal service to rural Canada." Mr. Benwell questions this, asking "What would be the need to go to the post office if I can pick up mail, parcels, stamps, etc. at the corner drug store?" And as far as handicapped people and the elderly are concerned, he points out that "there will be more outlets than there are now. They (the handicapped and elderly) will actually be closer."

Union spokesperson Al Arsenault fears many job losses and as to what will happen to today's children who will want these federal jobs in the future. "This can be fought and won," he says. "The government is supposed to be working for us, we must put pressure on all levels of our government, demanding an improved service, not a second-class service for a first-class price!" Mr. Benwell emphasizes that no jobs will be lost directly: "No one is being laid off. We have not and will not lay off one single person. If a person retires, and we don't fill that position, that person did not lose his job. We just didn't hire anyone."

A convenience store in Newcastle, NB operating a sub-post office was recently boycotted by the Newcastle-Chatham and District Labour Council. The CUPW feels that this kind of action is necessary to make the workers' point. Such boycotts do not prevent anyone from shopping the store in question but encourage consumers not to. It is not illegal for a business person to operate a sub-post office if he so chooses, however.