

Seniors, as a whole, do not own as many vehicles as other segments of the population. Also, seniors over 65 do not hold as many driving licences as people under 65. Super mailboxes are often inaccessible to seniors. They are placed in unprotected areas and are often lacking in proper lighting and maintenance, for example snow and ice removal.

With continued privatization, many seniors will have to become dependent on others to pick up their mail, meaning — and this is why I use the word “independent” — a less independent and less enjoyable retirement day after day, month after month, for the rest of their lives. They believe that receiving one’s mail is a freedom that should be available to everyone. Seniors, as well as all other residents of rural areas, should have the same access to public services as people living in urban areas. We have a post office that is felt to belong to all taxpayers, even though it may be a nuisance, and it is not very profitable, as we know, to provide exactly the same service everywhere in the country. The CBC has the same problem, but that is why it is publicly owned, or why people want it to be publicly owned.

In April, 1992, the government issued a news release in which the House Leader in the House of Commons stated:

Canada Post is now recognized as a modern, effective postal system able to compete with the best in the world at a price Canadians can afford.

Much of what is said there was illustrated to me when I made that visit approximately a year ago, the one about which I told you.

Millions of Canadians want and are proud of such an affordable service, but it is a service that should belong to all Canadians. The main purpose of my intervention today, honourable senators, is to say that I believe that many Canadians sense a threat to their dignity and independence by the threats to the universality of such services and in what they see as the elimination of whole communities from the national postal system.

I have told you the organizations that are concerned. Significant and diverse or heterogeneous groups of citizens are all concerned with what they believe this bill is leading to. As we identify problems that exist with our postal system, let us not create new ones which could potentially result in the deterioration of a system that is already recognized globally, and is becoming more appreciated at home.

Essential public services belong in public hands. That is our feeling. That is the main thrust of the material I have received from the organizations to which I have referred, and it is the main point I want to impress upon you today, honourable

colleagues, as we consider this bill. That is our feeling, and it is the feeling of labour organizations, postal workers and Canadian citizens across the country.

Privatization of Canada Post may not be evolutionary just because it is different. There is a tendency for us all to think that anything that is changed is progress; anything that is new is good. It is true that things are always changing and nothing stands still, but that does not mean that every change is evolutionary. It might be degenerative, to apply the Darwinian vocabulary and metaphor. Is it progress if it interferes directly with the independence of our citizens, particularly our senior citizens? We should not support any process that discriminates as to who will or will not receive postal services, accessible or otherwise.

Let us pursue carefully and sympathetically in committee the concerns that I have tried to put on the record here at second reading. Let us be sure that all of these organizations are invited to present their viewpoint to the committee, and let us listen to them. To do otherwise produces an effect that is too serious for the day-to-day lives of millions of Canadians who count on us here not to pass laws with such effects.

The Hon. the Speaker *pro tempore*: If the Honourable Senator Meighen speaks now, his speech will have the effect of closing the debate.

[Translation]

Hon. Michael Arthur Meighen: Honourable senators, I listened with great interest to our colleague, Senator Frith. I must tell you that I am very glad that he had time to visit the postal centre here in Ottawa. Otherwise, it might have been a little more difficult for him to believe what I told him the other day!

I see that, like me, he has great admiration, generally speaking, for Canada Post and its efforts to improve service.

[English]

• (1700)

I wish to re-emphasize to all honourable senators that the bill before us seeks primarily to improve labour-management relations and permit employees to share in the prosperity which they have played such a large role in creating. That is the thrust of this bill.

Some of the subjects raised by Senator Frith are ones which I, too, hope can be explored at committee, although I do say to him and to other honourable senators that they are not directly the subject of this bill.