

Government Organization

arrange and manage contracts for Canadian goods on behalf of other national governments or international agencies. It is largely devoted to the export of material but does engage in other activities. It would seem to be the perfect starting point for carrying out the recommendations of the Watkins report that a government agency be set up to deal with Iron Curtain countries so that Canadian subsidiaries of United States firms would not have an excuse for not attempting to obtain contracts with these countries. They would deal directly with the Canadian Commercial Corporation which in turn would deal with the state trading agencies in some of these other countries.

I might deal with one other specific matter which will come under the jurisdiction of the minister having to do with moving and storage. This is a fairly important item within government operation because of the movement of government personnel throughout the country and because of various other requirements of the government. The minister will be aware that there have been some complaints concerning recent government policy and practice.

As I understand the matter, the federal government first instituted a new system of purchasing moving services at the start of 1969. Prior to that time civil servants who were being moved would obtain estimates from three moving companies acceptable to the government and would then make a choice concerning which firm they wished to move them. With the new system the employees' choice was taken away and the decision is made by the Department of National Defence in the case of service personnel or the Department of Defence Production in the case of all federal government employees as to who will receive the business. I understand that the business was supposed to be rotated among those carriers which met the government standard of equipment and service, as published in the government of Canada list of acceptable carriers.

The Chairman: I must interrupt the hon. member to advise him that his time has expired.

Mr. Burton: Mr. Chairman, may I have leave to conclude my remarks?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Burton: Since the introduction of this new policy the government has switched and [Mr. Burton.]

is now giving its business entirely to one particular van line, Atlas Van Lines. This van line originally published a lower tariff than did the other carriers in Canada. I might note it is my understanding that while Atlas Van Lines does meet the minimum federal government standards, its standards in terms of warehousing and equipment are not of the same high quality that is found among most other acceptable carriers. Since this van line published a lower tariff the other carriers have met its rates, but the latest information I have is that the federal government is still awarding all its moving business to the one company that was the first to cut rates.

There would seem to be some element of discrimination here. Although I cannot support this I have heard that Atlas Van Lines has undertaken this policy and approach on other occasions in an attempt to obtain business with the idea that once it had a corner on the market it would be free to start raising its rates again. I certainly hope the minister will take steps to ensure there is an equitable policy that will apply to the various van lines which are interested in this type of business.

In conclusion I might note that while there is a potential for improvement in government operations and services by the establishment of the new department, particularly in the area of the technical services referred to by the minister, I think we should take note of the fact that the simple transfer of functions in the area of purchases and supplies from other government departments and branches to this new department will not automatically bring about an improvement in government services. In fact, there are a good many questions which could be asked in this regard. I believe there will have to be a basic change in government policies and governmental approach to some of these questions before there is a real improvement in this aspect of government operations.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fortin: Mr. Chairman, this debate on Part V of Bill C-173 concerning the creation of a Department of Supply and Services makes us wonder whether the present problem will be solved merely because the name of the department will have been changed, even if it should offer increased services.

Mr. Chairman, I would not want to prolong this debate unduly, as the hon. members who spoke before me have already raised some points on which I intended to speak. In fact, the spokesman for the New Democratic party