

Government Orders

up with the best possible package to serve the people of Canada because that is what it is in the business of doing.

Mr. Rod Laporte (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I welcome joining in the debate on this important bill which is changing Canada Post once again.

One of the most frustrating things I have experienced as a member since I have been elected is dealing with Canada Post. Coming from Saskatchewan and having a riding that is largely rural, there have been a number of rural post office closings in my riding as there have been right across the country.

What is most frustrating is that Canada Post will come into a community and advise the people that they are losing their post office. It holds a public meeting and tells people it is there to improve the services of Canada Post. It is going to give better service. People respond that they already have good service and like the present service. However Canada Post says it has to make some changes because it is costing too much money.

If Canada Post would be honest and open with rural Canadians I could understand it. If it would come into a community and tell people it was costing x thousands of dollars to run the post office and it is only bringing in x thousands of dollars in revenue, they could try and work something out so that they could keep their service and the post office could have a better bottom line.

I do not have a problem with that. What I have a problem with is the fact that Canada Post comes in and dictates what is going to happen. It simply closes post offices with no real consultation. For a long time I wondered what Canada Post was doing. It is clear that what it wants to do is privatize this corporation.

Mr. Blenkarn: That is right.

Mr. Laporte: The hon. member across the way says that is right. The problem is this. Canadian Post should come into a community and tell them it wants to provide good service and that the community should work with it. For example, there is a community in my riding that offered to buy the building for Canada Post. They wanted to give Canada Post a free building and save it money.

In places like Briercrest, where people like Bub Hill were working for the community they said: "Give us shorter hours. Give us fewer days. We would be happy with that".

• (1225)

Another community offered to let one of the town employees work part-time at the post office. Canada Post refused all those offers. It would not work with the community. It simply said that the community would be getting better service and it was closing the post office.

That only makes sense from the point of view of shutting rural post offices down. If this government had the interests of rural Canadians in mind, it would have a different approach to the rural post offices.

Some of these rural communities are struggling to survive. When the post office goes, it is their last contact with the federal government. Every post office in this country cannot remain. Things change. If there was only a more reasoned approach to how Canada Post buildings and rural Canada Post offices were operated, then we could deal with that.

This bill is simply an extension of the unwritten government policy. I note that last May the minister for Canada Post stated that immediate privatization was not in the cards. He made a comment: "If I had to bet, I would bet that in the next couple of decades you will see post offices being privatized all over the world. I would not mind seeing Canada first". Pure and simple, this is one more move down that slippery slope to privatization.

If the government would work with the union instead of ignoring it, we would have better labour-management relations. This idea of trying to placate the union by offering it 10 per cent of the shares without any real consultation with it is ridiculous. It should start dealing with some of the over 100,000 grievances that exist with Canada Post. That is almost two grievances per person. These things have been backlogged for years. There is some frustration that the Canada Post employees are feeling. This is an area where the government could start dealing with problems at Canada Post. It should not unilaterally come in with a bill saying: "Eureka, we have the answer," telling the union, Canada Post and Canadians what is good for them. That is the same attitude it had in closing rural post offices.