

Private Members' Business

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate. I was looking forward to hearing the other half of that speech prepared by Canada Post.

I do not have the other half because I am not here to represent Canada Post, but instead the people who Canada Post allegedly serves and who have concerns. Some of those concerns could be addressed by the legislation that we have before us if it were to be passed.

I am speaking about Bill C-280. The purpose of this legislation, although I am sure the mover of the bill referred to it, is to ensure that rural route carriers would be guaranteed the right to organize and become a full member of a union under the labour code and the Canada Post Corporation Act.

At present, rural route carriers hired on contract are not permitted to be members of any union. Rural route carriers, who are very familiar with postal service in rural communities, do not have any way to formally appeal any decision that adversely affects rural services.

This is something that the hon. member who just spoke perhaps should have taken into account unless, as is probably the case, he has seen his way through to defending the emasculation of rural post offices and rural postal service that has taken place during the rule of this government. If these rural postal workers had the status of people who were unionized, they could resist changes in rural postal service, not just on their own behalf, but on behalf of the communities in which they work. They are not able to do that now, they are simply terminated. Their contract comes to an end and if they do not like what is going on they have absolutely no recourse and their communities have no recourse through them.

One of the things that would happen if this bill is passed is that the corporation's extensive cuts to rural postal services might be slowed down in time for there to be something left of rural Canada by the time a new government is elected in the next election.

As I understand it, the Canada Post corporate plan calls for the closing down of every rural post office in Canada by the year 1996. This bill would get in the way of that plan and I think that recommends it to the House or at least to those who are concerned about that corporate plan.

Another strong point of this legislation is the fact that many rural route carriers have put in years of quality service to their communities and to Canada Post. At present, they have no access to seniority privileges or pension plans. We think that these employees deserve an opportunity, which this bill would provide them, to negotiate benefits.

An example which was provided to me by our post office critic is that of Joe and Blaine Young who served Rural Route 2 in Westport, Ontario for 25 years. At that time, they had missed only one day of delivery due to weather. They recently lost their bid to service Rural Route 2 to another bid that was only nominally lower in price. So you can see the kind of injustice which can be done to people who have served their communities well, who have the kind of seniority that along with merit would protect them in any other situation. Yet for a few cents, Canada Post can decide that couple, who served their community well, literally through rain, sleet, snow and hail, all these 25 years, one-quarter of a century, can simply, bingo, be gone and some entirely new person, new to the community, et cetera, or whatever can be brought in.

This is the kind of thing that we would like to see prevented and that we understand the hon. member's bill would prevent. It is the position of the NDP, even though it is a private members' bill, and I can assure the hon. mover of the motion that I speak on behalf of all my colleagues here, that Canada Post should encourage efficient and long-term service to rural routes by recognizing seniority and long-term quality service. Neither long-term nor efficient service will be encouraged when bids from contractors with proven track records are passed over in favour of bids that are nominally lower in cost.

I had some experience of this myself. I do not have any rural routes to speak of in the new riding of Winnipeg Transcona, but when I represented Winnipeg—Bird's Hill, I had rural postal routes. Whenever, in the name of this sort of seeking the bottom line, there were changes to the various contracts, there were always problems that came to my attention. The people who the community knew were reliable and who had done the job and knew what to do were sometimes replaced by absolutely new people. I do not see that postal service is the kind of thing that people should be trying to cut each other's throat for in terms of getting these contracts. People who