

The result is that the minister would be the only shareholder entitled to vote because the shares to which the employees are entitled are non-voting shares. Honourable senators will remember the experience with normal corporations. One of the important privileges or rights that attach to a share is the ability to vote at a shareholders' meeting and, in particular, to be able to vote for directors of the corporation who then run the corporation.

As I read this bill, we must not assume that by giving the employees the right to hold shares that we are giving them the same kind of power they would have in a normal corporation. In many large corporations 10 per cent of the shares can, as Senators Kelly, Meighen, Ross and many others know, sometimes mean control. I am not suggesting that would be the case here. It certainly is not if you do not have any voting rights.

How is it that gains or improvements would occur to postal services as a result of employees owning 10 per cent of non-voting shares? One would assume that if changes were to be made they would be made for the very purpose of improving the service that already exists. Therefore, assessing the benefits of an employee share savings plan involves seeing how the residents of Canada will receive improved postal services as a result of these proposed amendments.

• (1640)

That is not the only reason, but it was the only reason advanced by Senator Meighen, and I think quite properly, because I believe that is the legislative intent. I think that the main thrust, or the main object of this part of the bill is to improve employee/employer relations, and therefore productivity, because we have all, perhaps, not known in much detail — but I for one have been an admirer who probably should learn more about it — of the Swedish corporations where there is a very active participation by employees.

This bill tends to come under that banner, but does not seem to me to justify it because of the restrictions on the plan and the differences in distinctions between this plan proposed here and what we would normally think of when we hear the word "shareholder".

[Translation]

Honourable senators, how is this plan perceived by the employees of Canada Post? Under the employee share ownership plan proposed in Bill C-73, employees of Canada Post will be able to buy shares in their employer's business. Employees will expect the plan to help improve labour-management relations in the corporation. They will also expect the plan to help them save money to meet

short-term or medium-term needs or to build up retirement income.

In my opinion, share ownership plans are useful only if the kind of advantages I just mentioned exist. However, in this particular case, how can labour-management relations be expected to improve when Canada Post employees were not consulted during the negotiations that led to the current proposals? Labour-management relations are not exactly what they should be, when the Canadian Postal Workers Union is so emphatically against privatization and sees the bill before us today as a first step by the government in that direction.

Instead of trying to improve postal services, the government seems to be more concerned about maximizing the corporation's profits, at the expense of Canadians in rural areas and the elderly across this country.

[English]

What do those actively concerned Canadians think of this bill's effect on rural areas? I have a pamphlet here entitled "Rural Canadians and Canada Post". They call it "Blowing the Whistle on Customer 'Satisfaction' Surveys". In that pamphlet, Rural Dignity of Canada reports that, to date, 376 federally-operated rural postal offices have been closed in Ontario alone. This number increases significantly when one looks at the total number of shutdowns in the country — 1,409. It further reports that, if the government has its way, the remaining 4,000 rural offices will be closed by 1996.

These offices are being replaced sometimes by inadequate retail postal outlets, called RPOs, which are oftentimes located in gas bars, garages, beauty salons and stores. I know that, in Perth, our local full-service post office was shut down almost a year ago and replaced by two retail postal outlets. One is located downtown in a drug store, the other in a shopping mall on the outskirts of the town.

I know, from my own experience and the experiences of which I am told by other Perthites, that the services which they provide, although not full services, are very good. I know the people involved in both cases. Two friends of mine are giving the RPO service in the downtown drugstore; and with respect to the one out at the shopping mall, I hear nothing but good things about that service, too. However, it is a limited service. Some of my other friends in Perth tell me that now they feel schizophrenic in that there are certain services they can get from the drugstore, but for the rest, they need to have a box at the old post office. There is inconvenience then, but not bad service in the case of my hometown.

However, there is no guarantee for other places. If I believe the pamphlets I have been receiving, we cannot guarantee that many of these other outlets will provide the same level of service that once was provided by the post office.