

K. Sears

Alberta

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Gentlemen:

My name is Ken Sears.

For the past thirty years I have been a full time working in the Lethbridge Post Office, the Vancouver Mail Processing Plant, the Nanaimo Post Office and, for the last ten years back in Lethbridge.

I am also the President of the Lethbridge Local of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and have been for the last nine years and a bit but before you dismiss what I have to say as the usual special pleading from a Union hack I'd ask you to consider this.

I'm on the down hill road to retirement and unless Canada Post manages to totally bugger up the pension plan it looks as if I'll make the handshake and the gold watch so I have less of a vested interest in defending the status quo than someone who has most of their time in the PO stretching ahead of them.

Secondly, having been a union activist for almost three decades now, in one capacity or another, and having experience in the way the Post Office manages and mismanages on the ground: from the mech plants to the single RSMC stuffing mail into a CMB at some crossroads in the middle of the prairie, I have a rather privileged perspective: being at once inside the day to day workings of the PO and yet maintaining a skeptical distance from the waves of corporate enthusiasm which wash over CPC management on a regular and recurring basis.

So; lets look at the Canadian Post Office coming up to the end of the first decade of the Twenty First Century.

Oddly enough I'd have to say it's not working all that badly. The public seems to think so.

UPS obviously thought so. They went to the expense of hauling Canada Post before the NAFTA tribunal because they couldn't compete.

Now, outside of the major metropolitan areas of this country, they were right. They couldn't compete. Fed Ex can't, DHL can't. Purolator can't even though they are a creature of Canada Post.

They can't compete because they don't have the infrastructure.

In this country if you see a red and yellow delivery van tooling down a secondary highway it's because the driver is lost or someone's stole a delivery truck off a downtown city street and is making their get away.

And they all recognize this. Which is why they all use Canada Post to deliver their bills, Why Fed Ex and UPS use Canada Post to deliver their little " We're sorry we can't deliver the widget you ordered off of E-Bay " notices to small towns and farms across the country.

The problem is they don't want to compete. Every body knows this. There's no money in delivering mail outside of the big cities. That's why the Parliament, in its wisdom, granted Canada Post the exclusive privilege on first class letter mail. To cover the loss incurred by the universal service obligation, which goes hand in hand with the exclusive privilege.

You can't have the first without the second.

Uh uh. No way. It just won't work.

Take away the universal privilege and expect somebody, anybody to deliver mail to Pouce Coupe B.C. without racking up deficits that 'd make the debts Canada Post ran up in the nineteen seventies and eighties look like pop bottle money. Don't bother. It won't work.

Hell, expect someone to deliver much of anything to the exurbs of places like Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver or to their suburbs for that matter.

Again it won't work.

It would rely on three things:

First: Cheap gas.

This is a monstrously huge landmass and the demise of general railroad service leaves the roads and highways the only way to deliver goods for most of the country.

Everybody's pretty much in the same boat there it's just that Canada Post is obligated to deliver tote that bale and deliver that packet to every lost little settlement down every dead end two lane road in the country. They have to go further, more often and they can't say no.

Secondly. Cheap labour. Reliable labour.

Ah ha. I hear you say. Here's where the bias comes in.

Damn straight.

You can have cheap labour or you can have reliable labour. You can't have both. Not unless the economy tanks in big way and if that happens all bets are off anyway.

The experience with the RSMC and CUS routes in Alberta this past five or six years proves that.

The turn over in RSMC drivers and in Combined Urban Services Contractors and short haul highway service contractors is simply staggering.

Even with the incremental improvements in the RSMC wages and working conditions since they were organized it has been impossible for Canada Post to recruit and hold employees in Central and Northern Alberta and the problem is beginning to

show up in the GTA and the lower Mainland in BC although it has yet to reach the devastating chronic proportions it has in Alberta.

Canada Post's response, which has been to attempt to circumvent the Union and channel, the work back into the hands of a couple of labour contractors based in Edmonton and Calgary has been absolutely wrong headed.

It appears as though some sections of CPC upper middle management on the Prairies at least have been willing to but up with appalling service and absolutely insane costs from their labour contractors in a fond attempt to return to the dear dead days of yesteryear when they held the rural Route drivers in particular in a quasi feudal servitude based on a tri annual re negotiation of delivery contracts.

What they don't appear to have noticed is that, for the moment the shoe is on the other foot and the master contractors are sticking it to Canada Post as hard as Canada Post ever stuck it to the contractors back in the day.

Of course this leaves the actual workers getting screwed royally but what the hey. Most of them are immigrants anyway. Besides they don't usually stick around long enough for anybody in the Post Office to learn their names much less see that they get at least a start on training how to do the job.

So; that's two things. The third thing that would be absolutely necessary to ensure mail delivery services continue in this country under de regulation; under the removal of the exclusive privilege, would be a massive and ongoing subsidization.

Now there are some who look at pretty much any government service and chant like good little school children " De regulation. De regulation. The private sector can do it better and cheaper.

Oddly enough that is one of those comforting little fictions that graduates of the Chicago School of Economics and the denizens of the U of Calgary Poli Sci Department have been telling themselves for decades now and for which they have yet to provide any convincing proof.

Give the private sector a free hand in providing what used to laughingly called public services and utilities and what do you get.

Corruption, cuts in service and escalation in costs. The private sector is intrinsically no more intelligent than the public sector and their basic intent is so different as to set them up for failure when it comes to providing any economic benefit other than that which shows up in a quarterly report or an annual stockholders report.

And here is the nub of my submission to you.

You will, I am sure, be receiving submissions talking about the social benefits, the social and economic necessity of a continuing healthy postal service to the polity of this country.

All of them earnest. . All of them well meaning and all of them true.

The postal service provides a long term economic benefit not directly measurable in quarterly profit and loss.

The Senate of Canada has just issued a Committee report under the chairmanship of Senator Hugh Segal examining rural poverty in this country.

Among other things the Senators recommended government support for the active strengthening of various infrastructures in this country and the de centralization of the government presence and services into the small communities to serve as a resource and a nodal point for economic growth in otherwise isolated and depressed areas.

Reading this it occurred to me and I wrote as much to Senator Segal that the template for this decentralized presence and infrastructure already exists in this country in Canada Post. It would be counterproductive to destroy what is already working and working quite well, for the sake of scratching an ideological itch on the part of some upper management and a gaggle of politicians who may well be gone before the flowers bloom again next spring.

I thank you for your time and apologize for the colloquial way in which this submission is written.

Had you been conducting the usual sort of hearings with oral submissions this is pretty much the speech I would have given you.

Basically what I have to say is this.

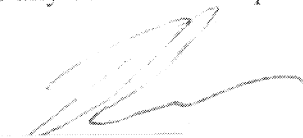
The Canadian Postal service is working relatively well under the present universal service obligation and the concomitant exclusive privilege.

De regulation will not provide service improvements and in fact would probably have a negative effect not only upon Canada post as a viable economic engine but upon the polity of this country which relies upon a web of government provided infrastructures, the Post Office among them, to pursue their own economic and social interests.

So, if you're the type who habitually skip to the conclusions there it is as neat as I can give it.

Again I thank you for your attention. If you have any comments or questions I can be reached at:

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