

Government Orders

The American election proved how disconnected George Bush was with small town America. George Bush was a prisoner of the White House. He had no idea what was going on in America. This Prime Minister lives in the cocoon at 24 Sussex. When he finds the courage to venture out of that cocoon, it is only in the confidence and pleasure of \$500 a plate dinners for the PC Canada fund. When is the Prime Minister going to see the reality that faces every Canadian every working day in this country? When is he going to see Bill C-91 is not in the interest of Canada? It is not in the interest of the Canadian consumer or our Canadian health care system. It is in the interest of the multinationals. Who does the Prime Minister represent because it is pay-back time?

Mr. René Soetens (Ontario): Mr. Speaker, I rise to participate in this report stage of Bill C-91. I am pleased to do so.

The reasons I am rising are many. Hopefully during third reading stage I will have some additional comments on why this bill is good for Canada. I have been listening to the debate that has been going on today about how the government has behaved; how it has truncated the hearing process; how it has restricted members of Parliament from participating fully in the process.

I would just like to give some information which may be of interest. I was chairman of the committee during the entire process. Although my appointment did not officially take place until Friday, two weeks ago, it was talked about on the Wednesday. I participated very fully with the clerk of the committee to see if we could line up some witnesses in advance of the actual committee stage, because numerous witnesses had requested the opportunity to appear before the committee.

In my role as chairman trying to help the committee delve into its responsibilities, I asked if we could line up some witnesses in case the committee could very quickly do its work and get the process started. I received confirmation from the clerk that if we were ready and willing, there were members of the public and interest groups who wanted to appear, and could make their cases known to the committee and members of Parliament.

Unfortunately the committee process did not work. Members of the opposition in particular spent a consid-

erable period of time talking and in fact, prevented things from happening on that Friday. They prevented things from happening on Monday. We debated for probably three days in which order we would allow members to speak. After finally deciding on that order, on many occasions they took the opportunity to rise on points of order in committee to say: "Just a minute, we do not agree with this order, we do not agree with this order, we challenge the Chair". That is the process of committee and that is the way it works.

In the last four years that I have been here, it has been my experience the committee process is where we, the members of Parliament can do our most valuable work. It is where we can review, research and understand the views of witnesses and amend and change the legislation.

Unfortunately, that did not work.

• (1330)

Where we could have had five, six or seven days of hearings, where we could have heard up to eight or nine witnesses a day, we did not have the opportunity to do so because there was a filibuster.

I acknowledge that on the government side there had been a clear indication that it wanted the bill back to the House of Commons quickly. We could have, even with the government's timetable, heard some 40 to 50 witnesses without any hesitation. On the other side the government could have met its agenda as well. We members of Parliament in committee could have done work that was necessary to do.

Mr. Karpoff: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, my understanding of parliamentary protocol is that the chair of the committee is supposed to be neutral. Again we are now seeing a demonstration as to why this committee ran into difficulty. The chair was not neutral. The chair was not even properly sworn in by the House before he was trying to bring forward the government's agenda of what was happening, saying it was going to decide that it was going to get this through by a certain date.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): Order, please. I may remind hon. members that the parliamentary committee has submitted its report and thus no longer exists, which also means there is no chair at this time.