

Government Orders

was to read from a petition, and that I as a government member was trying to keep him from his rights of free speech in representing his petitioners in the House.

I have had a chance to examine the petition and to examine the tape of what the member said in the House. I would simply like the House to know that he went beyond the petition in dragging in the issue of a Canada-U.S.-Mexico free trade deal and that he dealt with the motivation of a company called Multinational Resources which was not indeed part of the petition. Therefore the statement he made in the House about his own behaviour is simply incorrect and I think very inappropriate given the nature of the day and other things that had happened earlier in this House.

Mr. Langdon: Mr. Speaker, I certainly concede that I have not been a member of this House for as long as the government Whip but I have learned, and I hope that you will bear me out, that it is the custom of this House that if one decides to launch a personal charge of some sort that notice be given to the person and generally speaking that one waits until the person involved is actually in the House.

I would hope very much in the spirit of trying to see to it that we do have civility in the House that the government Whip would get up and withdraw his comments now. If he wishes to raise them at a future point when the member is in the House I am sure that our House leader will be quite prepared to respond.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The comments are unanswered now and I think that once the hon. member for Kamloops is in the House he may reply if he likes. I do not feel that we should get into that any further. The hon. member for Kootenay East has the floor on debate.

Mr. Sid Parker (Kootenay East): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to enter into the debate on Bill C-22, an act to enact the Wage Claim Payment Act.

It is without a doubt a step in the right direction. Bill C-22 is proof that the government shares many of the concerns of the area of protection for workers affected by the Bankruptcy Act. I would also like to say that although it took seven years for the government to act it has at least started to act in bringing in this bill.

I do not think I need to remind members of this House that the previous Liberal government failed to act on this important matter during its time in government. The member for Nickel Belt has risen on numerous occasions identifying the problems workers have when bankruptcies take place in trying to acquire their wages.

I agree fully with the basic principle of Bill C-22, that it addresses the issue of compensation for employees and it allows for some breathing room for businesses facing bankruptcies. These are actions that New Democrats, I believe, and all Canadians support.

This bill like all legislation is based on a principle but it is also an attempt to define and put into place regulations that attempt to bring the principle to life. While I support the principle and general thrust of Bill C-22 there are in my opinion a number of ways to greatly improve the legislation.

I would like to offer a couple of suggestions which I believe were also made in committee. First, there is the issue of priority in cases of bankruptcy. Bill C-22 does not really give jurisdictional priority to workers. It does not challenge the traditional hierarchy of creditors. The only wage claim payment contained in the bill is in fact external to the bankruptcy settlements process. It comes in the form of employer tax to be collected through the system.

What this government is doing is getting some additional taxation by passing a bill and again hitting the very people who are going to have the hardest time in trying to pay, and that is the small business people and the various small businesses which are trying to operate in very competitive markets.

Yet the government is determined to bring in this kind of taxation that will bring about those kinds of problems. For instance, it does not address the issue of private pensions. What about the pensions within the protection of a bankruptcy act. People have paid into pensions, or are part of a private pension scheme. While we look at the protection of the wage portion of it, what about the pensions? I say to you that while we are addressing the kind of work that went into this kind of bill, that is this big and this thick, and with all the committee work that went on, surely the government could have considered protecting pensions also. There are some very serious flaws in this bill.