

Government Orders

The hon. member reviewed many sections of the bill. He mentioned how the bill had moved rather quickly and came off the platter in March. Does the member really think that a bill that has 159 pages, that is so complex, and involves the pensions of all the public servants, the RCMP and the armed services personnel of this land—it came out of committee on Friday at report stage when the Speaker gave his ruling. As a result of extended hours it continued after 3 p.m. on Friday until 5 p.m. and it picked up again on Monday. We had all the votes on Monday night, 37—some votes. Despite all those amendments we debated just part of Friday and Monday, and we are in third reading today.

Does the hon. member, with his experience and his knowledge as a lawyer, think that is a very lengthy time to consider something that is so complex?

Mr. Brewin: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

It gives me the opportunity to elaborate on one particular point. The short answer to his question is that the time for debate in the House itself was probably reasonable enough if the government had chosen to participate in the debate itself, although it is a long and complicated bill.

It was in committee over a few months and there were a number of hearings from interested groups, including the Public Service Alliance of Canada, the ex-spouses group and so forth. They tended to be hurried along. I attended a couple of the committee hearings and they packed in a lot of witnesses. They tended to be fairly cursory. They asked a few questions of the government, not very many. There was a sense that it was a treadmill that the government was trying to get through.

The larger flaw in the process, and the one the government ought to take another look at for next time and for any future bills, is that the government seems to have gotten away from the practice of producing a draft bill; maybe even turning over to a parliamentary committee at first the responsibility of drafting a bill, or at least the outlines of a bill or writing a memo to the drafters on the kinds of issues that should be covered by a bill and the positions that should be taken.

Instead, it was all done internally. The first thing that surfaced in March was this big fat bill. At that point the government was already in a defensive mode on the bill.

The Treasury Board officials who had overseen the drafting of it were in a defensive mode. They had to justify what they had done to their political masters. There was very little flexibility, notwithstanding the earlier intervention from the parliamentary secretary. Instead of doing what was sometimes done before of circulating a bill in the general community so that lawyers and others who had a capacity to work with the legal language, and it is very technical legal language in this bill, could work with client groups and try to work through: "This is what it means and this is what it does not mean", and then almost to engage in a process of negotiation with the drafters, that process was missed entirely.

• (1830)

I had a chance on one clause of the bill to try to do a subversion of that exercise. I worked a bit with one of the ministers, the parliamentary secretary and the Treasury Board officials and the drafters. We tried to work around it, but it was very hit and miss. I say the government member himself did not understand what we were talking about and was really not involved in the process. He just basically said: "Go deal with Treasury Board". The process was very flawed.

I think what the government should look at in future, when it comes up with a complicated bill like this that will have an effect on a lot of people, is circulating a draft bill and giving the community a real chance to take a look at it before it introduces it in Parliament. That would help in the process.

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre): I rise to speak on Bill C-55. As you know, Mr. Speaker, when this bill was initially introduced, our caucus voted in support of the bill in order to let it go to a committee so that members of the different pension plans could come forward and make their case known. Today we will not be supporting the bill for a variety of reasons.

Before I start putting forward some of the argument on why we will not support the bill, I want to talk a little bit about the idea of a pension plan. The first thing that comes to mind when we talk about pensions is our senior citizens who have built this country, who have stood by this country during the good times and bad times, those who have been loyal Canadians throughout the years, those who lived during the Depression, those who know