

*Government Orders*

There had already been a great deal of controversy and a lot of contradictory information as to the impact of the bill. At a steering committee, the government informed us that it was not prepared under any circumstances to have full and thorough hearings on the bill. It wanted the committee wrapped up and all witnesses heard by the following Tuesday.

The next day, we went back to the committee and tried to dialogue with government members. We tried to get them to understand the significance of this bill to Canadians, to families, to seniors, to provincial health plans and to get them to agree to a realistic timetable for committee study.

We put forward a clear timetable, to study this bill for three weeks, and then take the Christmas break off. We would have an opportunity in the last two weeks of January to call more witnesses, to debate this bill clause by clause in committee.

We guaranteed this government that we would bring this bill back to the House so that the House could make a proper decision no later than February 15, within two weeks of the House returning from its Christmas recess.

Anybody out there knows that was a fair and equitable position. What did the government do? It said no and it simply adjourned the committee from Tuesday until Thursday. On Thursday the government made clear to us that this bill was going to be reported back to the House and that witnesses were going to be heard no later than the following Tuesday. If we did not agree to a short, truncated committee hearing, the government was perfectly willing to have the committee report with no witnesses being called.

We immediately agreed to start hearing witnesses. Of course, on that type of time schedule it was difficult getting organizations to come forward. On Friday, only two out of the six witnesses appeared.

We had six hours of hearings set aside but only two witnesses appeared. At the end of the first hour I tried to put a question to one of the witnesses and I was ruled out of order by the chair. The government would not let me put additional questions to the Canadian Medical Association.

At the end of the next hour we had not finished properly questioning the witnesses. We had four hours wherein we were going to do nothing. I asked for consent that the witnesses be allowed to stand over so we could

ask additional questions. What did I get from the government? It was a denial. We had the witnesses there and the government would not even let us put questions.

It became clear and obvious to everybody on this committee that the government was determined to push this bill through before the Canadian public could understand the consequences. What are the consequences? They have become well-known.

A study in the United States shows that Canadian drug prices are 32 per cent lower than in the United States. We have had expert witnesses testify based on information provided by the ministers of health from across this country and others that the cost is going to be in the billions of dollars.

We have had information that the promises made in former Bill C-22 as to the number of jobs being created in research and development have not materialized. Information has been presented that the investments multinational drug companies make in Canada are mainly because of the tax write-offs, not because of the patent legislation in Canada.

We start thinking, why is the government pushing ahead, why is it trampling on democracy? First of all, it said it was because of GATT. Two things have emerged. GATT has not been agreed to. Even in the drafts of GATT it was clear that there would be long periods of phase-in and there would be opportunities for exemptions. It became obvious that government's excuse around GATT did not hold water.

Then of course it was because of NAFTA, the North American free trade agreement with the United States, Mexico and Canada. It required the government to bring its laws into line with those of the United States in terms of patent protection. However, NAFTA has not been approved. Why the hurry? NAFTA is not going to be approved for several months even in this Parliament, let alone in the United States.

Of course, it became increasingly clear that this whole process was being directed from outside of Canada by the American drug companies, the big multinationals. They were deathly afraid that with the election of President-elect Bill Clinton in the United States, he would take a second look at drug prices in the United States and decide that the only possible way to control drug prices in that country would be to adopt a Canadian system of compulsory licensing and prices review.