

Government Orders

• (1310)

In any event, I hope that has answered the question and I hope the caution light is on. Please do not pass subclause 16(1) of this bill.

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre): Madam Speaker, I would like to speak on this bill. I want to thank my colleague for his very nice presentation of our party position *vis-à-vis* this bill.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the bill was introduced in order to repeal the Public Land Grant Act and to amend the Public Works Act, the Financial Administration Act and the Surplus Crown Assets Act, so as to consolidate existing generic real property legislation into one act. I think by itself this is something which is extremely important and a point well taken.

Another purpose of the bill is to simplify and modernize real property management in conveyance practices by the government.

A third aspect of the bill would not affect real property governed by special programs legislation. Examples of this are: the National Parks Act, the Indian Act and the Territorial Lands Act. The bill would also permit the use of conveyancing practices commonly used within the private sector, those making it easier to deal with the federal government.

All these objectives are good ones. These supposedly are the main reasons the government has moved on this bill.

Like any legislation of course it is extremely important to look at both sides of the issue. We have to look at the strength as well as the weakness in the legislation. To be objective, there are certain strengths in the legislation. It would consolidate under a single enactment all of the statutory authority for land management. It will define more clearly land management and it would reduce quite a bit the red tape in the system. What the bill does not do is specify the complete procedure of real property transaction.

Rather than repeating what my colleague was speaking about I will give some real life examples in my riding of Ottawa Centre.

Just a block away from the House of Commons we have a mall called the Sparks Street Mall which has three different partners. There is the city of Ottawa

which owns part and parcel of that mall. There is the federal government which owns approximately 40 per cent of the mall in terms of real estate. The balance of the properties are owned by the private sector.

Mr. Speaker, you perhaps would be very disappointed to know that the overwhelming majority of those properties owned by the federal government are sitting empty. They have been sitting empty now for over two years. Many of those properties are in big need of a tenant and also in big need of maintenance.

I do not want to talk about the maintenance aspect of it. I want to talk about the tenant aspect of it. The federal government failed in a sense to manage its property on the Sparks Street Mall properly. As a result of its mismanagement not only has it caused my city to lose valuable tax dollars in revenues through business taxes, but also it negatively affected other businesses on the street. Therefore we have a mall with approximately 30 per cent of the businesses sitting empty. That is one example of the mishandling or the mismanagement of real property owned by the federal government.

What the government should do in a situation like this is either hand it over to the board of management of that particular mall so it can properly, efficiently and aggressively look for tenants to occupy those buildings.

It is not feasible at the present time because the federal government is asking for a lot of things from the private sector. As a result it is becoming fairly difficult for a tenant to occupy those properties.

Another example of government lack of action is found across from Parliament Hill. We have approximately 150 acres of land on Lebreton Flats which has been sitting idle and empty now for approximately 25 years. In the winter the Regional Municipality of Ottawa—Carleton, an organization that represents 11 different municipalities in our region, uses it to dump snow. In the summer a part of the flats is used for campers, balloonists and people who might want to take a walk or others who might want to walk their dogs.

The federal government through its agency the National Capital Commission has discussed the issue of consultation with the city of Ottawa and the Regional Municipality of Ottawa—Carleton. The NCC has had consultation with members of the private sector. It appears to have come to grips with the issue and seems