

*Government Orders*

• (1140)

Of course that is the purpose of omnibus legislation, to allow a government to hide a number of lemons among the Cadillacs. It is a procedural tactic employed to prevent members of Parliament from effectively representing their constituents, a tactic that deprives them of the opportunity to exercise their direction in choosing which policies they support and which policies they oppose.

In the case of Bill C-17, the use of this tactic forced the Reform Party to play politics somewhat, to engage in procedural games in order to represent its constituency. The only way we could express our support for some of the clauses in Bill C-17 while simultaneously expressing our opposition to other parts of the bill, notably the clause granting borrowing authority to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, was to table a series of report stage amendments.

This allowed us to break up the bill for the purposes of debate. It also produced a situation in which members of the Reform Party were forced to vote against their own amendments. I know a lot of members were concerned about it and raised that question. However, it was the only way we were able to set up a circumstance where we could vote on individual items in the bill and then be able to express our constituents' will.

The second point I wish to make is with regard to lack of a plan. That is the second reason the Reform Party opposes Bill C-17. While we view many of the measures contained within as a good first step and while we support the general principle and the direction of some of these changes, we are troubled by the absence of any overall vision in Bill C-17. It is similar to the vision we witnessed in the budget as a whole where there was not a vision that was seeking some kind of a plan or a future or an identifiable objective for the country as a whole.

I would like to look at the parts of Bill C-17. It consists of five parts as the House well knows. First, public sector compensation; second, reductions in the Canada assistance plan and the public utility income tax transfers; third, the reduction in transportation subsidies; fourth, CBC borrowing authority; and fifth, the item that is being well aired and vented in this assembly, unemployment insurance and the actions taken thereon.

Let me deal with each one. The first one is public sector compensation. The Reform Party supports the government's move to extend public sector wage freezes for an additional two years. While we are troubled by some of the inequities that arise from the freezing of pay increments within salary grades, we are prepared to support this in recognition of the government's difficult fiscal situation.

Some people have tried to portray the Reform Party as public servant bashers. This is absolutely unfair. The reason we support the continuation of the public sector wage freeze is because of the recognition that in difficult times, and these are difficult times, everyone must make sacrifices. While it is true that many in the public service have not had a raise in a number of years, the fairness of the wage freeze becomes apparent when we compare what has occurred in the private sector in this last recession.

We need only ask the tens of thousands of private sector employees who have been victimized by corporate downsizing, those who have been laid off as businesses struggled to meet the demands of globalization. We should ask these people if they would have accepted a salary freeze in return for job security. I am sure the answer would have been: "Yes, I am prepared to do that".

However, most of those people were laid off and are out looking for other ways to support their families, their mortgages and their responsibilities. In fact, a considerable number of private sector workers have gone even beyond just salary freezes. They have gone to salary rollbacks in order to save their jobs.

This is not to be seen as a positive development but rather as an acknowledgement that if Canadians are to meet the increasing demands of the global markets then everybody, employer and employee, must be prepared to sacrifice in this partnership that is a responsibility of all of us.

• (1145)

With an equally formidable problem facing the government in the form of our massive debt, Reformers do not see it as too much to ask that the public servants, who according to a recent study conducted by the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses are paid 14 per cent more than those people in the private sector with comparable jobs, accept the extension of a salary freeze.

We in the Reform Party, in acknowledgement of this difficult fiscal situation, have tried as well within our own party and our own caucus to demonstrate some leadership in this area by taking a voluntary 10 per cent to 15 per cent salary reduction. We are not asking the public service to do anything that we are not prepared by example to do ourselves.

However, while we support the government's action in this area, we also believe that this alone will do very little to bring the government's deficit under control. It is my guess that the government had no idea where to cut or how to deal with the priorities, and it saw the salary freeze of the public service as an easy target and that target was placed before us in the budget.