

*Government Orders*

certainly be glad to have an opportunity to put forward a revised bill. However, the government did not. This is what is so astonishing.

Second, one wonders about the indifference of this government when it has heard speaker after speaker, witness after witness, with some very rare exceptions—I would say one out of 10 witnesses—indicate that his or her organization was pleased with the proposal. In most of the interventions that we listened to, they said: “Please give us another measure or leave us under the present guidelines”.

One has to wonder what it is within the machinery of government that makes it so insensitive to the input that has been collected by the committee process. This is what troubles me profoundly. What happened to Bill C-78 is that the government and the chairman of the committee in charge of Bill C-78 did not call one meeting between December and April of this year. This led us to conclude that the submissions made by witnesses had made a point, that they had registered and something was happening.

The previous minister in November and December indicated on a number of occasions that he was going to produce some regulations for us to look at to show how the bill would work, and that he would produce a package of amendments. Fine. We were glad to hear that.

Come January, nothing happened. The same in February, March and April. Now, after all these months, we discover that the government's silence was not due to the fact that it was elaborating on the input received by interested parties as a result of the committee process—which under the old rules was one of the best in the world, we are now heading toward a system that is very narrow because we will hear and admit only technical witnesses—that having heard all the witnesses and receiving that input, the government was elaborating and proposing changes.

We were hoping that the government would introduce a new version of the environmental impact assessment legislation as a result of that. Instead, we discover in the motion we are debating today that actually that has not happened.

The government is blindly, in an insensitive fashion, proceeding as if nothing had happened in 1990. As I mentioned a moment ago, it also decided to remain inactive on this bill for four solid months. This is unusual behaviour on the part of this already decrepit and bankrupt government, as seen in so many other fields of policy making. This was demonstrated by its behaviour on this particular bill which was intended to be a demonstration of the imagined Progressive Conservative commitment to the environment and to sustainable development.

That was the foundation. It was going to be the pillar of Conservative commitment to the practical application of sustainable development as embraced by the Prime Minister at home and abroad on a number of speeches, and by four subsequent environment ministers at various gatherings internationally.

The Government of Canada was committed all the way to sustainable development and the environment. Here we see that when it comes to putting into practice words and rhetoric, this government has fallen flat on its nose.

I would not want to end with only a general statement. I would like to substantiate what I am saying with a very precise analysis, in the time available to me, of our serious reservations about the old Bill C-78, which is now being forcibly reintroduced. Also I would like to explain why we thought that, as a result of questioning and representations, the government was thinking it over and was going to reintroduce a better version.

There is nothing wrong with introducing bills that are poorly written. It can happen to anyone. We know that. What is wrong is the blind indifference to the input received in a process which is intended to improve the quality of the bill. That is the point.

Let me bring to your attention a few sections. In general, one has to say that the objections to the bill were threefold. One, it gave too much power—it still does because that is what we are debating here today—to the department which initiates a certain project.

Second, too much is left to the regulatory power of cabinet. Third, there does not seem to be anywhere in the bill an explicit authority given to the Minister of the Environment allowing him or her to reject a specific project.