

Government Orders

Of course Bill C-113 fooled some people. It fooled all but two of those Conservative members who have spoken out against Bill C-105. Those two remaining hold-outs eventually voted with their constituents instead of voting with their party.

However, Bill C-113 did not fool the people of Canada. The opposition to the new bill has been just as widespread and just as angry as that which confronted the government's first bill.

When the legislative committee on Bill C-113 started holding hearings, hundreds of groups and individuals opposed to the bill requested the opportunity to make a presentation to the committee. The opposition to Bill C-113 shows no sign of diminishing. I still receive letters and faxes from opponents of the bill who wish to present a brief to the legislative committee. I have petitions here with signatures of more than 5,000 Canadians who want this bill withdrawn.

The popular opposition to Bill C-113 was evident two weeks ago in Toronto when 3,000 angry demonstrators marched through the streets of the city protesting these changes.

What I am simply outlining here is the fact that the government has become extremely distant from the people of this country. That opposition was evident last week in Montreal when opponents of this proposed legislation broke down two doors at the Queen Elizabeth hotel where the Minister of Finance was scheduled to make a speech. Those protesters had to be restrained by the police. This is the type of anger that is being vented against this bill, which is extremely unfair and unjust to Canadians.

Bill C-113 is the cause of such anger. The changes to the UI act contained in this bill are absolute, arbitrary and unfair. They are going to cause pain for some Canadians and they are going to push some into desperate situations.

The employment minister and the Minister of Finance do not seem willing to accept this. They do not seem to believe that the changes they are proposing are going to cause economic suffering. It is easy for them to deny it since they do not come into daily contact with unemployed Canadians.

However, the civil servants who work in Canada Employment Centres know better. Many of them under-

stand that this bill is just not right. They fear for their lives and are worried about how some UI claimants might react when they learn that they are not eligible for benefits. The government has acknowledged that the potential for violent reactions in CECs as a result of these changes is a possibility. At the legislative committee the deputy minister admitted that his department is going to be improving security at CECs.

If this bill is so fair and just and if these changes are needed and are morally, socially and economically acceptable, then why would Canadians, perhaps the most tolerant people on earth, react in the manner in which they have?

Already the threat of violence hangs in the air. Last week in Montreal a CEC had to be evacuated after it received a bomb threat. It turns out that there was a bomb but the detonator was defective. As a representative of the employees stated: "They were able to evacuate this time but next time, who knows?"

The people who work in CECs, who live that reality every day, have taken matters into their own hands. This week they started distributing a booklet entitled "For a Just Cause" that is designed to help UI claimants get around the obstacles that this government is throwing in their way.

Naturally the government is cracking down on the distribution of this booklet thereby contributing to the atmosphere of distrust and resentment which surrounds Bill C-113.

Why has this happened? How did the relationship between the government and the people of Canada deteriorate to the point where we have to seriously consider beefing up security in government offices?

• (1615)

Reaction has been so strong because the changes to the unemployment insurance program contained in Bill C-113 threaten every Canadian who has a job.

By reducing the benefit rate from 60 per cent to 57 per cent of insurable earnings, the government is going to be taking money out of the pockets of some families. It may only be \$80 a month, but for some households that represents the hydro and phone bills or a weekly order of groceries. For the vast majority of Canadians who live pay cheque to pay cheque, losing an extra \$80 a month can be a major set-back.