

Government Orders

Something has happened, however. It changed along the way. We do not know why. We have our thoughts on it, but we know that no longer do we have the workers' protection fund. That is extremely important. The main reason we felt this bill was important for Canada and for workers was that for the first time it brought the amount of money they could get into real 1990 dollars. No longer were we dealing with 1949 dollars. We were dealing with more money than they were getting in the past.

As we look at the travelling this bill has done over the past year or so we see that the bill has been changed substantially to the effect that all it does is reorganize and leave the workers out in the cold. We are talking about workers who are affected by bankruptcy. We are talking about workers who all of a sudden find that the vacation pay they have coming and the back pay they are due will no longer be given.

I think it is important for us to come to terms with a certain number of definitions. There are three definitions we want to be sure we are aware of. First, we are looking at super priority. Now what does that mean? Super priority is what was originally intended in this bill. It is no longer there. What super priority means is that if you are a worker you go to the front of the line. You do not wait at the back of the line until the money dissipates and then when you come up you find that the banks, the government, the secured creditors and those other people got their money before you. Yes, you do have a right: You can claim as much money as you want, but it is not there.

That is what super priority means. You, as the worker, the person who is least able to assume the burden of the debt of this company, you get paid first with what is left when that company declares bankruptcy.

That super priority disappeared. It is no longer there. That was an essential or quintessential part of this bill. That is why we in the NDP said that we had better support this bill with the government because it is doing the right thing. Well, they did the right thing but not for very long.

That super priority for workers was tossed aside and the first priority was still given to banks and to secured creditors.

How do we define secured creditors and unsecured creditors? These are two definitions. Secured creditors are those who are at the front of the line. They are there and they get paid. They are the first ones who get paid. Generally, after they have been paid, we find out that close to 70 per cent of the time there is no money left for the others.

Unsecured creditors are those who are left after secured creditors have been paid out. Among those unsecured creditors are the employees.

What we have here is a bill called Bill C-22 which originally was going to give super priority to workers. It does not do that. It continues along the line of making sure that the banks get their money.

There is something else here in this bill which is one of the most surprising things. It is that even the government has decided to allow a certain amount of its own rights to taxes and so forth to go by the wayside so there would be more money in the fund for banks and others. It has decided to forego some of its own rights so that the taxpayer, who is counting on the government to recapture its own taxes and other moneys owing, will not be paid.

Not only do you have the workers being shafted, but you have the public in general being shafted as well.

When the government dropped the idea of super priority it proposed a tax which was going to be levied on the employers. This tax, as proposed by the Conservative federal government, was to be about 10 cents per worker. This would make it approximately \$61 million in order to create a fund which would be used to pay workers.

• (2200)

We on the NDP side said: "No, we think people are taxed enough", and the government was quite surprised. It did not expect the opposition that came from the NDP and from its own members. We felt that taxing people for this fund was not the way to go and that it should come from general revenues.

When we made this representation the government was freaked out because the NDP said, as did the backbenchers of the Conservative government, that