

*Government Orders*

especially after I heard the intervention of the hon. minister. I am not sure that we are talking about the same bill.

I guess I would have to start by contesting some of the affirmations that have been made with such assurance; first of all, that the committee that was studying Bill C-21 had ample time to consider all of the deliberations. It will be instructive for all members of the House to appreciate that the legislative committee was empowered to study this bill only after with the opposition that the committee actually do travel, and in so doing perhaps get a sense of how the government and the country should actually be receiving this Bill C-21. The committee was not empowered to travel until the end of August. After much debate, the committee went to 14 cities in a bare 21 days. It was able to hear 202 briefs, 157 of C-21. If the minister actually did read them, as she said she did, and I have no reason to believe that she did not, she will have been struck by the absolute visceral as well as steady reaction to many of the amendments that she says were absolutely necessary for the UI bill to reflect the new needs of Canada.

• (1150)

The fact that there were others who did not react as vehemently is a reflection, as the parliamentary secretary to the minister has said on several occasions, of the fact that there were interest groups that wanted to promote a particular view and vision of what should happen to the UI legislation.

It is fair to say that perhaps repetition does drive home a point. Of those who actually found something worth while in this proposed bill, most objected strenuously to the government's withdrawal from the UI program; that unemployment insurance was no longer going to have the participation of the government.

That is important for all hon. members because unemployment insurance was deemed to be unconstitutional and that the government did not have the right to introduce such a program until 1940 or 1941. There had to be a constitutional amendment introduced empowering the government to participate in such a program. That constitutional amendment gave the government the right to be a third party in a tripartite program whose scope, whose intent, and whose direction was insurance, income support, and income maintenance at a time when

a contributor might find himself or herself without work. In other words, this program was supposed to be designed to ensure that there would be a modicum of continuance and constancy in the revenue required by Canadians from all provinces, from all sectors of our economy, and from all classes of our society to live with the decency and dignity that a fair remuneration would give to all Canadians which we value as one of the paragons of western civilization.

When we were faced with many of the organizations who came before us as a legislative committee, we took to heart some of the studies that they produced, some of the statistics that they generated, and some of the other surveys that they examined and researched by way not only of contrast or of support in some cases, but in all cases there was the view that the Unemployment Insurance Commission changes represented by Bill C-21 were in fact in the best interest of all Canadians. However, 157 of the 202 organizations who appeared before the committee said, "Absolutely not. This in no way represents Canadian interests, in no way at all".

The parliamentary secretary says, "You're wrong". In most cases the hon. member was there when all of these presentations were made and heard exactly what they said. We had representations from church groups, poverty groups, labour organizations, business organizations, organizations representing the disabled, women's groups, ethnic groups, farmers' groups, fishermen's groups, all of them, to a man or a woman said that this government is headed down the wrong road; the direction that it is pursuing is absolutely inimical to the interest of all Canadians. The parliamentary secretary knows that. I cannot understand why he would persist in suggesting that because there were labour groups that actually dared to question the statistics presented by the government, that in some fashion they were speaking an untruth, were perpetrating an image or an illusion that the truth lies somewhere outside the government's statements on this issue.

Members of our committee would have dearly loved to have heard from the general public, many of whom had written to the committee and asked for the right to appear. In all cases where they were able to do so, we heard a tale of woe. It is not surprising. This country is a vast territorial entity. There are great diverse and divergent social and economic conditions and realities that