

Wayne Marston Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, ON

Mr. Speaker, I want to begin today with a couple of quotes.

The Canadian Bar Association said: “It is difficult to see what issues or problems this bill is trying to fix. It provides for a greater public disclosure of information on labour unions’ financial operations and restricts their political and lobbying activities through mechanisms that could be problematic constitutionally and in terms of privacy”.

The member who sponsored this bill, who is in the House with us today, said that public disclosure, which will help the public better understand how the benefits are provided, is being utilized. He also said in an interview that he had not received a single call or complaint from any member of a union or the general public, saying that they wanted the information that they were unable to obtain.

During the finance committee hearings on Bill **C-377**, we heard from witnesses who spoke about Merit Canada. Merit has had dozens of meetings on this bill with the sponsor and with the **Prime Minister's** office officials. At committee, when they were before us, the carpenters were there talking at the same time as Merit. They were testifying.

Mr. Speaker, were you speaking to me?

Wayne Marston Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, ON

Representatives for the Merit group and the Carpenters union were in the room. I asked the representative for the Carpenters union: “If Bill **C-377** passes, would Merit Canada see a financial gain?” Of course, he said “yes” and went on to speak about it.

Clearly, the Merit group is a competitor to the building trades and, in particular, to carpenters and electricians. It would be competing for the same jobs, seeking to employ its workers as the union would be seeking to employ theirs. However, the Merit group would know the bid structure that the unions were working from. Where do we ever see that in the business community?

We hear talk about big labour bosses in this place. I am not quite that big, but I am getting there. I signed my first union card at 14 years of age in 1961. I was a member of the CBRT&GW and later with the communications workers. I was vice-president and president, both terms of six years. I was an executive member of the Hamilton and District Labour Council for 28 years and president for 14 years.

Wayne Marston Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, ON

Yes, as a friend was saying, all elected and repeatedly elected.

However, I had close to 20 years as a rank and file member previous to that. I attended monthly union meetings where I reviewed line by line and then voted on our monthly financial statements. The trade union taught me one important lesson, which may be why Bill **C-377** is before us here today, and that was to question authority.

In the 1980s and 1990s there were two leaders fighting for justice and equality and questioning authority. Nelson Mandela was first supported by the Canadian labour movement when it was not acceptable in society. Then there was Lech Walesa, a trade union organizer, human rights activist and co-founder of Solidarity, the union. That was the union believed by many to have started the downfall of the Soviet Union. Both Mandela and Walesa were feted and honoured in Canada by our federal government.

To my Conservative colleagues, I want to share some information about union operations they may not know. Please take a moment and listen. In fact, I doubt if many members of the Conservative Party have ever set foot in a union hall, union meeting or a union convention. Therefore, I will try to inform them as to why Bill [C-377](#), in my opinion, is not needed.

I spoke of my early years as a rank and file member, but later, around 1979, I became vice-president of my local union at Bell Canada for communications workers and then president. In those positions, I was responsible for ensuring that the treasurer's reports were complete and available to our members each month.

As an officer and a delegate, I attended union conventions, political Federation of Labour conventions and Canadian Labour Congress conventions, where we received and voted on audited financial statements, approved future workplace information campaigns, and also campaigns to inform the general public of the labour movement's views on municipal, provincial and federal governments. For 14 years as president of the Hamilton and District Labour Council, we also produced monthly financial statements and yearly audited statements for our delegates. Therefore, if this is the case, why is Bill [C-377](#) before us?

Bill [C-377](#) is intended as an attack weapon against unions that do not share the Conservative government's political view. In other words, unions question the authority of the government, which is one thing the Conservative government has a great deal of difficulty with.

Unions have stood up against the policies of all three major political parties at one time or another, including the NDP. Therefore, as Walesa and Mandela did, unions continue to stand up for their members and in doing so stand up for the broader community. The last I heard, this is how our democracy is supposed to work.

Bill [C-377](#), in my opinion, from the very first has been a flawed piece of unnecessary discriminatory legislation designed solely to impede legitimate member-approved union activities that call into question the actions of the Conservative government. Any union member who says that they do not know the functions of their union has not been attending their monthly union meetings where they are debated and voted upon.

We are in favour of transparency, but it must be applied fairly to the organizations that should be targeted and must not cause harm. The bill violates the rights of association, privacy and freedom of expression. The privacy commissioner agrees with that statement, by the way.

The bill is an ideological attack on labour organizations, and it is interesting, because it uses the words "transparency" and "fiscal responsibility" to mask its real objectives.

It would be a costly bill. It would cost millions of dollars to put into place and to establish the databases, which will cost at least hundreds of thousands, if not millions of dollars a year, going forward. The estimates that came before the finance committee were based upon 1,000 organizations. More than 25,000 would be covered by this in the labour movement of Canada. This is a huge burden for both government and workers. The purpose would lessen the vitality of those organizations to defend the rights of workers. Imagine what would happen if there were an additional 17 million hours of paperwork foisted on to business, like it would be foisted on to labour?

Bill **C-377** would also give confidential information to businesses and government, which would give them unfair, competitive advantages and political advantages over the labour movement.

Why does the bill target only labour organizations and not all organizations? There are other organizations in the country that receive the benefits of tax breaks and, further, they receive them from the government. In fact, the government promotes many of them. Is this not discriminatory? Are the Conservatives comfortable spending millions of dollars for the records of unions' financial transactions during this period of fiscal restraint? Are they comfortable disclosing so much private and personal information on Canadians?

I realize I am getting close to the end of my time, but we have a bill to deal with an issue that nobody was complaining about, except the government. The Conservatives decided that they lost an election in Ontario because of the labour movement, and this is the end result. This is the reality of what it is all about.

There is another minor point: double taxation, and it is double taxation exactly. It would cost the taxpayer to institute Bill **C-377** in the government. However, it would also cost the same taxpayer who happens to be a union member because 4,300,000 would have their union dues raised by the Conservatives. Is that not a first. They would have to pay for it. How do we think it would get done?

Now there will be Conservative union dues for the union workers in the country, and I am sure they will send letters of thanks to the government.