

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, February 27, 1990.

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Recreation): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to table the Annual Report for 1988-89 for the Manitoba Arts Council.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, may I direct Honourable Members' attention to the gallery where we have from Ecole Lagimodiere forty-five Grades 5 and 6 students. They are under the direction of Lise Voyer and Ray Fisette. This school is located in the constituency of the Honourable Member for Springfield (Mr. Roch).

On behalf of all Honourable Members, I welcome you here this afternoon.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Forks Development Visitor Centre Status

Mr. James Carr (Fort Rouge): My question is for the Minister of Tourism. Mr. Speaker, \$2.4 million has been set aside by the federal Government and an equal amount set aside by the provincial Government toward the construction of a tourist centre at The Forks, all a part of the Canada-Manitoba Tourism Agreement. The deadline, in a letter from Jake Epp to the Minister, said that by January 31 the Minister had to raise \$4.2 million. The deadline according to another federal Minister, Thomas Hockin, was March 31, the date that the agreement itself ended.

Through some sort of controversy they split it down the middle and tomorrow in fact is the deadline for the Minister to raise \$4.2 million. My question to the Minister is, seeing that tomorrow is the deadline, how much money has he raised?

Hon. Jim Ernst (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Mr. Speaker, the whole question of the tourism centre at The Forks and so on has been a bit of a convoluted matter, as the Member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Carr) has indicated. I can indicate to the House today that we are having ongoing discussions with the federal Government over a different revised plan which I think will serve the purposes of both the provincial and federal Governments and the people of Manitoba.

Mr. Carr: Mr. Speaker, with a supplementary question to the same Minister, does that mean that the Minister

has given up on his fundraising efforts in the private sector, and what effect does this have on the \$4.8 million of public funds which have been designated towards the centre at The Forks?

Mr. Ernst: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, a different proposal involving private sector in this particular venture is being explored at the present time under a different scenario than was originally contemplated. When we have that matter finalized, I will be pleased to report it to the House and to the people of Manitoba.

* (1335)

Mr. Carr: Mr. Speaker, would the Minister please shed a little bit of light on what he is now discussing with the federal Government? We know that there are competing visions, not only between the federal and provincial Governments but between Members of the federal Cabinet itself, on what ought to go at The Forks. Can the Minister tell the House and, through us, the people of Manitoba, just what it is he is contemplating and how much it will cost?

Mr. Ernst: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to my honourable friend a moment ago, we are pursuing a different proposal at the moment. When that proposal is ready for announcement, such an announcement will be made.

Mr. Speaker: The Honourable Member for Fort Rouge, with a new question.

Mr. Carr: I have a new question, and I am really sorry that we are getting the kinds of answers we are from the Minister, especially when his Government talks about open Government.

Boat Basin Construction

Mr. James Carr (Fort Rouge): My new question to the Minister of Tourism has to do with the beginning of construction of a boat basin at The Forks. We understand, Mr. Speaker, that work began last Friday. Can the Minister tell the House why no announcement was made that construction had begun, and can the Minister also tell us what the value is, whether contracts were tendered and to whom the contract is given?

Hon. Jim Ernst (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Mr. Speaker, firstly let me inform my honourable friend that this is an agreement between two Governments, the Province of Manitoba and the Government of Canada. When both Governments are ready to make an announcement, an announcement will be made, and it is incumbent upon each Government not to make any announcement until such time as that occurs.

So it is not a question of not wanting to be open or anything else. It is a question of dealing in good faith

and fairness with your partner in these agreements. Regardless of which Government happens to be in power at the time, it is incumbent upon both to honour the agreement. That is No. 1.

The second question asked just now—Mr. Speaker, those actions are all actions of The Forks Development Corporation of which the Minister of Urban Affairs (Mr. Ducharme) has some involvement, so I will have to take that portion of the question as notice on behalf of the Minister of Urban Affairs.

Mr. Carr: Mr. Speaker, we understand that the boat basin is being built with monies under the Canada-Manitoba Tourism Agreement. If that is not true, the Minister should tell us today and put it on the record. They have already begun construction on the boat basin, why will the Minister of Tourism not tell us that it has begun, who got the contract, and how much it costs?

Mr. Ernst: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, the matter falls under the jurisdiction of The Forks Development Corporation. What they undertake to do, who they award contracts to and so on, is the business of The Forks Development Corporation and the partners thereof.

Mr. Speaker, at such time as the Minister of Urban Affairs returns to the House, I will be pleased to ask him to respond to those questions.

Mr. Carr: Mr. Speaker, we have yet another example of, after you, Alphonse; after you, Gaston. We cannot get honest answers to simple questions in this House about The Forks Renewal Corporation because no Minister on that side is prepared to take political responsibility for it.

Will the Minister answer this simple question: Where does the \$2.8 million come from?

Mr. Ernst: Mr. Speaker, I do not know how many times I have to tell my honourable friend, if The Forks Development Corporation wants to undertake a project, they are entitled to undertake a project. They will, in due course—the shareholder, on behalf of the people of Manitoba, is the Minister of Urban Affairs (Mr. Ducharme). I have indicated I will take those questions as notice until such time as the Minister returns.

Health Care Computerized Monitoring Cards

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Second Opposition): Mr. Speaker, Canada's health care system is under—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Honourable Member for Concordia. Order, please. The Honourable Member for Concordia has the floor.

* (1340)

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian health care system is—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Doer: They keep leading with their chin, Mr. Speaker. What am I going to do? I do not know.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please; order, please. Time is extremely scarce and there are numerous Members wishing to gain the floor. Order. The Honourable Member for Concordia.

Mr. Doer: I better order 20 mirrors, Mr. Speaker, so the Members beside me can look in the mirror in terms of the action they took last night. My question is to the Premier.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order, please. The Honourable Member for Concordia.

Mr. Doer: The federal cutbacks in health care are slowly eroding the national Medicare system in this country, the heart of Canada, in terms of the people of our country and the people of this province. Recently, the Alberta Health Services Commission has introduced a feasibility study on the introduction of a plastic health care card system. This commission is recommending that people be rewarded or punished for a healthy or unhealthy lifestyle. It will be used as a means of rationing health care. In other words, a potential computerized cap on health care in one of our provinces.

My question to the Premier (Mr. Filmon) is, will he tell the House whether or not the Government is considering the introduction of a computerized plastic card for health care?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Mr. Speaker, to begin with, let me say that I do not believe in punishing people for utilization of the health care system. Second, let me say that we as a Government have done everything we possibly can to enhance services in health care in this province.

In two budgets that we brought into this House, the first budget increased spending on health care by double the rate of inflation. The second one which was passed last June increased funding for health care by approximately 7 percent, well above the rate of inflation. We brought in the most generous, most ambitious capital works program in health care that this province has ever seen. We did so because we have a firm commitment to health care in this province and will continue that commitment.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a document from the Manitoba Health Services Commission indicating that the Government established a working group in January of 1989 to study the issue of a plastic health card in our health care system. It is conducting surveys with other provinces.

My question to the Premier is, what is the status of that committee and the recommendations of Government on the use of a plastic health care card?

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Mr. Filmon: Mr. Speaker, I will take that question as notice on behalf of the Minister of Health (Mr. Orchard) and bring back a full and complete response just as I am sure that the Member for Concordia (Mr. Doer) would want.

Mr. Doer: We have a situation where doctors fearing caps on their patient services now, notwithstanding the wage dispute, but the whole issue of capping of health care services. My question to the Premier is, from a perspective of health care policy, would the Premier now not reject the concept of a plastic monitoring card, the possibilities and the potentials for invasion of patient privacy and privacy of the care of patients with a doctor of their choice?

* (1345)

Mr. Filmon: Mr. Speaker, this Government will not invade the privacy of patients and their relationship with their physicians. This Government will not limit the access to the use of the health care system by the people of this province. Those are commitments that we have made and indeed will keep as we have kept all of our commitments to the people of Manitoba.

We are not interested in rationing health care as was done under the previous NDP administration. We are not interested in doing what they did when they imposed a freeze for almost a year on capital works spending in health care. Those are the kinds of things that were very detrimental to our health care system. We are not interested in closing beds wholesale as they did in both the closure of more than 100 beds on a permanent basis in our major hospitals in this province. Those are not solutions that we believe in. We are not going to do those things. We are going to support and make a commitment to health care as our No. 1 priority.

Patient Record Confidentiality

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Second Opposition): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the First Minister (Mr. Filmon) will open the 85 beds that were left to him by the former Government and perhaps then his rhetoric would be somewhat consistent with the facts. He has not rejected the idea of a plastic health care card, which is being implemented now in the Province of Alberta.

My question to the Premier is, how does this fit with the security and confidentiality of information in terms of the sale of Manitoba Data Services, and will he table the security plans of his Government to protect the personal health care records of patients and doctors in Manitoba?

Hon. Clayton Manness (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry I did not catch the full import of the question, but let me assure the Member if he wants to pursue the comments that I made on the record when I spoke to the MDS divestiture enabling legislation, that I indicated to Members of the House at that time that I would undertake to present to them, to the extent that I could, some of the wording around the agreement with either of the two proponents to give them some greater comfort with respect to what the Government

is contemplating to secure the maximum security necessary in support of all of the individual files of Manitobans, in health areas, in driving records, whatever the wish is. I can say, Mr. Speaker, to Members opposite, it is our intent to be fully open in this matter.

Varta Batteries Closure

Mr. Gulzar Cheema (Kildonan): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Industry and Trade (Mr. Ernst). We are constantly seeing the unfortunate effects of free trade, a deal which was supported by this Government.

Mr. Speaker, closure of Varta Batteries means 192 employees losing jobs. Many of them live in my riding, 44 of them. These people have worked for 14-20 years. They are losing their jobs and they have no place to go. Can the Minister tell us, what did he learn about the impending disaster?

Hon. Jim Ernst (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Mr. Speaker, we first received notice in the department from the federal Department of Investment Canada on December 8, 1989. On December 15, 1989, a revised plan was submitted.

Mr. Cheema: Mr. Speaker, can the Minister tell us whether he had any other correspondence, other than this letter, which his Deputy Minister wrote on December 22, to save these jobs?

Mr. Ernst: Firstly, Mr. Speaker, after we received notice, I faxed the Minister responsible for Investment Canada in Ottawa and asked him to postpone his decision in order that I could meet with company representatives.

Mr. Speaker, I met with those company representatives on December 21 for some two hours. We explored a variety of ways and means of trying to firstly save the existing plant, secondly to see if Government financial incentives were acceptable to save the plant. In addition to that, we pursued options with regard to other areas of business, both with Varta and with Johnson Controls, all of which were unsuccessful.

* (1350)

Labour Adjustment Strategy

Mr. Gulzar Cheema (Kildonan): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the acting Minister of Labour. Can the Minister of Labour tell us whether they have met with the union to discuss the various options available so that these people are not forced to go on the street, and they can feed their families?

Hon. Jim Ernst (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Mr. Speaker, I can respond to say that staff have met with the Auto Workers Union and the employees of the company. Adjustment process has been explained and background work completed for establishment of a committee. The union is of the

opinion, at this time, they do not want to proceed with an adjustment committee pending an opportunity for them to see if they cannot see if the plant can remain open.

Department of Environment Smokestack Emission Tests

Mr. Speaker: Honourable Member for Inkster.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please; order, please. The Honourable Member for Wolseley.

Mr. Harold Taylor (Wolseley): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if that was a Freudian slip.

Manitobans are no different than other Canadians in their concern for the quality of their air. The concern relates to the potential negative impacts on them and their family and on the environment in general.

In this province we only have to look back at what happened with Canadian Bronze and the pollution it spewed on a north end school ground some few years back. In addition, we have the Flin Flon example of the blanket of unhealthy air that goes over that town every day by the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company.

Will the Minister of the Environment (Mr. Cummings) tell us why Manitoba Environment no longer conducts smokestack emission tests?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Environment): Mr. Speaker, we are monitoring the air quality in the immediate vicinity of the mill and certainly have been keeping track of any concerns related to the distribution of the smokestack outfall. I am not sure if I can answer clearly the Member's question. I would like him to expand on his question, please.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, occasionally these days we can see an Environment Manitoba official casting their eyes up to the top of a smokestack that is spewing smoke. Can the Minister explain what good he thinks that a visual opacity test actually achieves? Is he as convinced, as the NDP was, that the polluters can be relied upon to be self-policing and to be left to their own devices in the case of air emissions out of smokestacks?

Mr. Cummings: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the Member is implying that Environment should be doing all of the monitoring and not requiring the industry to do some self-monitoring then I suggest he is wrong, because all that does is pass the costs back to the taxpayers and the public purse.

Mr. Speaker, in relationship to the air quality in and around that community, we have been concerned for some time about the quality of air and the outfall from that mill. A great deal of the problem, however, comes from the mill house itself. We have been actively working, as a Government, to lead toward the long-term correction of that problem.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, it will be interesting to see if that same sort of action is going to be forthcoming for all smokestack emissions in the province.

Federal Budget Impact Environment Programs

Mr. Harold Taylor (Wolseley): Mr. Speaker, my question to the Minister, further on the same subject, is: What action is he taking to protect Manitoba interests, given the \$50 million cut by the federal budget last week on the national acid rain emission program? What are the specific impacts on Manitoba? What is he doing to minimize the impacts by these Tory cuts?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Environment): Mr. Speaker, the plans to reduce acid emissions in this province are unchanged.

Day Care Workers Salary Increase

* (1355)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (St. Johns): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier (Mr. Filmon). Today's announcement by the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Oleson) on the crisis in day care is a complete and absolute deception in terms of the demands of the child care workers and the needs of the child care community.

The only thing guaranteed in this announcement today is another 24 cents an hour increase for day care professionals, the same as they got from this Government in the last two budget years, the same amount that drove child care professionals to take work action and embark upon a day of protest.

I want to ask the Premier (Mr. Filmon), since he appears to be abdicating responsibility and telling parents, you decide, in terms of the needs you have for maintenance grants and upkeep of your centres and fair salaries for day care workers, how he can justify, after this demonstration of concern and this clear need in our community, how he can justify only another 24 cents an hour increase for day care workers?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe that I am getting this kind of questioning from -(laughter)-

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order, please. The Honourable First Minister.

Mr. Filmon: Mr. Speaker, it is nice to see so many Liberals here enjoying themselves this afternoon.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Filmon: It occurred to me that there are probably more Liberals in the Senate than there were in the Legislature last evening.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please; order, please. I will remind the Honourable First Minister (Mr. Filmon) that reference

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to either the presence or the absence of Members is out of order. The Honourable First Minister.

Mr. Filmon: I agree, thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe that the Member for St. Johns (Ms. Wasylycia-Leis) would carry on her blind, mindless criticism of the initiatives that we are making toward day care in this province. She is now down to the stage where she is speaking for nobody in the day care community.

I will read to her the news release that was issued on February 27, 1990, by the Manitoba Child Care Association. That is today, Mr. Speaker. It says: "The Manitoba Child Care Association responds favourably to the Government's decision to accept in total, the recommendations of the working group." It says: "We are especially pleased that the funding initiatives" that they refer to in their news release "become effective in April of 1990 whether or not a provincial election is called." Because of course they do not trust the NDP to do anything for them because they did not for six and a half years—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please; order, please. The Honourable Member for St. Johns.

Ms. Wasylycia-Leis: We are not talking about the recommendations of the working group, we are talking about the action taken by this Government in response to the contributions by the child care community given the fact that there has been no increase in maintenance grants at a time when cost of living has gone up over 18 percent.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Ms. Wasylycia-Leis: What advice is this Premier (Mr. Filmon) and this Government prepared to give to those centres who now must choose between nutritious food for their children, having been forced to turn to food banks to ensure adequate food supplies for the children in their centres, and now give fair salaries to child care professionals? How can he justify putting the onus on parent-run day care centres to make those difficult—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The question has been put. Order, please. The Honourable First Minister.

Mr. Filmon: Mr. Speaker, as we have reviewed the matter of child care, one thing was obvious. There was a chronic underfunding problem left in place for the day care community by the NDP. That particular Member for St. Johns (Ms. Wasylycia-Leis), who was largely responsible for leaving them in this underfunded situation, has the audacity and the hypocrisy to stand up here and continue to criticize this Government that, in the space of two budgets, increased funding by 45 percent and today announced that for next year the increase will be an additional \$5.2 million of additional funding to the day care people of this province in recognition of their concerns, in recognition of their needs.

She has the audacity and the hypocrisy to stand up here and criticize that. Mr. Speaker, that is ridiculous.

Ms. Wasylycia-Leis: There is nothing more callous and cold hearted than a Government to give another 24 cents an hour increase to child care professionals in this province and to refuse to address the seriousness of this issue.

Day Care Grants Legal Opinion Request

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (St. Johns): My final question to the Premier (Mr. Filmon) is, given that this announcement includes a disguised direct grant to profit child care centres by way of a dollar a day per child increase in the rate paid by Government for each subsidized child, and increasing in existing profit centres, which is in our view, a breach of the current law, it breaks the law of the land—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The question—

Ms. Wasylycia-Leis: Can the Premier (Mr. Filmon) tell us if he is prepared to get a legal opinion of this increase and if he is prepared to once and for all ensure—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The question has been put. Order, please. Order. The Honourable First Minister.

* (1400)

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the provision that has been made, and the commitment that has been made, by this Government through our Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Oleson) of \$5.2 million of increased funding for next fiscal year will increase the salaries of trained child care workers, to approximately \$19,000 through this process.

The response of the Manitoba Child Care Association to our efforts, all of the efforts that we put forth into the working group and the task force and all the information that we provided was, and I quote: "This is the first time the child care community has had an active role in determination of the child care budget." They have lauded this administration for doing finally something that has been lacking for many, many years, particularly under the former administration, the NDP administration, of which she was an integral part and she failed them miserably.

Drought Assistance Assessment

Mr. Laurie Evans (Fort Garry): In less than two months, farmers in southern Manitoba could well be out in the fields planting their crops. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Findlay). He has indicated a willingness to provide some drought compensation to these farmers.

My question is: has he completed the assessment of the severity of the drought in southern Manitoba, and has he come up with a dollar figure that he feels would be appropriate for that compensation?

Hon. Glen Findlay (Minister of Agriculture): I can tell the Member that back in January we made an analysis on the loss ratio information that crop insurance had obtained on the claims that have come in. That loss ratio information was used to detail a program and a proposal to the federal Government which was given to them in January.

Cost-sharing

Mr. Laurie Evans (Fort Garry): In Mr. Wilson's budget, he indicated that farmers would be looked after through the contingency, but he went ahead and reduced his contingency fund from over \$3 billion to approximately \$1.2 billion. Can we infer from this, Mr. Speaker, that the Manitoba Government is prepared to cost-share any drought payment to Manitoba farmers?

Hon. Glen Findlay (Minister of Agriculture): At this point, the proposal is in front of the federal Government from Manitoba, and I understand Saskatchewan has done the same. We are both awaiting a response from them. We would believe that they have a high level of responsibility, if not the entire responsibility, of making a payment in this direction to the western Canadian farmer.

Farming Industry Impact Low Water Levels

Mr. Laurie Evans (Fort Garry): My final supplementary is to the Minister of Rural Development (Mr. Penner). We notice in southern Manitoba that many reservoirs are virtually empty. Can the Minister of Rural Development indicate what contingency plans are in place for water services to farmers in southern Manitoba on the assumption that we will get normal conditions in March and April?

Hon. Jack Penner (Minister of Rural Development): Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for Fort Garry is certainly right. Many of the reservoirs in much of Manitoba are at a very low level. Many of the communities are looking at ways and means and have in some areas formed task forces to study ways and means to protect themselves in the future of situations such as they might be contemplating and facing today.

I want to indicate to the Honourable Member that we did last year put in place an additional \$1 million to help alleviate those kinds of concerns and indicate to communities our support to drought proof some of those areas and maintain for the long term a water supply to those communities. We will be keeping a very close eye and monitoring the situations of the various communities that might be affected.

Port of Churchill Continued Use

Mr. John Plohman (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, the federal budget has hit directly at the heart of Canadians, striking at health care, at education, at regional development and Native and northern programs. We also find that the federal Government is requiring Ports Canada in

the budget to contribute \$100 million in cash, which would be used for short-term capital needs for those ports.

I asked the Minister of Northern Affairs if he has sought assurances from the new Minister of Transport at the federal level on behalf of the northern communities that he represents and the people in northern Manitoba that Churchill will not be sacrificed to reduce the deficit created by Liberal and Tory corporate tax loopholes?

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Northern and Native Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the records of this province will show how committed the Conservative Party is, has been for many years, in support of the Port of Churchill. That commitment has been there and that commitment for the Port of Churchill will remain with this Party.

Port of Churchill Continued Use

Mr. John Plohman (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, that is all rhetoric. I ask the First Minister (Mr. Filmon) if he can assure this House that his Government has discarded the Lyon doctrine which was enunciated by Sterling Lyon in 1983 when he said that he did not want taxpayers' money being put into federal areas into Churchill. He opposed it.

I ask the First Minister (Mr. Filmon) whether he has rejected that policy, or is that the reason why we do not have a federal-provincial agreement on Churchill at this time as yet?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Mr. Speaker, this Government—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Filmon: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the adult day care centre could calm down a little bit.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please; order, please. I would remind the Honourable First Minister that all Members in this Chamber are Honourable Members. The Honourable First Minister.- (interjection)- Order. The Honourable First Minister.

Mr. Filmon: Mr. Speaker, in response to the question from the Honourable Member for Dauphin (Mr. Plohman), this Government has continued to make a strong and firm commitment to the Port of Churchill. We have indicated throughout our time in Government, as we have in the past, because I can remind the Member for Dauphin he was not in this Legislature at the time, but under my colleague the Minister for Northern Affairs (Mr. Downey), who was then the Minister of Agriculture, he held a major conference in Dauphin on the Port of Churchill. At that time the

administration of Sterling Lyon made a commitment to keep the Port of Churchill operating to foster greater use and diversification for the Port of Churchill, and we are continuing to pursue a commitment to keep Churchill viable, and that will indeed continue to be our commitment.

Mr. Plohman: Mr. Speaker, the previous Leader of the Conservative Party said no provincial dollars, unlike the former Government of Manitoba, the New Democratic Government that put up \$58 million toward the Port of Churchill. In view of the fact that Churchill is in serious jeopardy and his Minister of Transportation (Mr. Albert Driedger) is going to be spending \$15 million for pictures on driver licences over the next five years, will this First Minister now direct that that \$15 million be used for an agreement on Churchill as a higher priority than putting pictures on driver licences over the next five years?

Mr. Filmon: Mr. Speaker, we have made a commitment to the protection and safety for humans on our highway system and on our road system. We are proud of that commitment, just as we are proud of the commitment that we have made to do everything in our power to eradicate drinking and driving in this province, because we believe in the safety of the Manitoba people who are on the highway system, unlike the New Democrats who could care less about the safety of individuals—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please; order please. The Honourable Member for Dauphin, on a point of order.

Mr. Plohman: The First Minister is imputing motives. He is saying that we are not concerned about safety of drivers in this province. That has been demonstrated to be a false statement by that Minister by the actions of our Party and our Government while in office and the statements that we have made in this House.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. As the Honourable Member for Dauphin has stated it is -(interjection)- As the Honourable Member for Dauphin aptly pointed out, it is a false statement. It is clearly a dispute over the facts. The Honourable Member does not have a point of order.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh!

* (1410)

Native Affairs Secretariat Urban Native Strategy

Mr. Speaker: Order, please; order, please. The Honourable Member for Niakwa.

Mr. Herold Driedger (Niakwa): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the Estimates questioning, the Minister of Northern and Native Affairs (Mr. Downey) stated categorically that the Native Affairs Secretariat was devoting a substantial amount of its resources and a

substantial amount of its time to the development of the Urban Native Strategy. Now we find that the Government has once again hired a consultant to tell us what to think and what decisions to make.

My question for the Minister of Northern and Native Affairs is this: how is the Native Affairs Secretariat involved in the Urban Native Strategy process, and just what is its role?

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Northern and Native Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the Urban Native Affairs Department has been working, not only in the City of Winnipeg but throughout Manitoba dealing with the Metis and Indian community in Manitoba. I am proud of the work that the department has been doing. As the Urban Native Strategy has developed, monies have been put in place to work with, through a consultant, an Urban Native Strategy of which is involved the Native community, the leaders, and as many individuals as possible. It has been at the request of the urban Native leaders that we have continued to employ the individual and the consultant who has been doing that work. If the Member wants to argue with the leadership of the Native community, then I will make sure that they get the Hansard of which he is opposing their request.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Minister's Confidence

Mr. Herold Driedger (Niakwa): The Minister caused a review of the Native Affairs Secretariat to be undertaken in 1988. Does this use of consultants, rather than his own department, reflect the Minister's continued lack of confidence in the Secretariat?

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Northern and Native Affairs): No, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Herold Driedger: Well, then, Mr. Speaker, if this is not a lack of confidence, then yet when he has an opportunity to demonstrate that there is confidence in the Secretariat, he replaces one acting director with another acting director. He by-passes his staff for input for a consultant, paid advice rather than an impartial one. Why?

Mr. Downey: I have to say to the Member that the majority of activities that have gone on within the Urban Native Strategy, within the Native Affairs Secretariat, have been carried out in consultation with the Native community. I have not unilaterally made decisions, but I have worked very closely with the Native community dealing with the real concerns, not the political posturing of the Liberal Party.

Mr. Speaker: The time for Oral Questions has expired.

NON-POLITICAL STATEMENTS

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): Mr. Speaker, may I have leave to make a non-political statement?

Mr. Speaker: Does the Honourable Member for Gimli have leave to make a non-political statement? (Agreed)

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Mr. Helwer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and Members of the House, for the opportunity to bring to your attention a milestone in Canadian history.

It was on a Saturday night in Hamilton, Ontario, in February of 1920 when Hal Rogers, an ex-soldier recently returned from the First World War, got together with 13 other young men, who, like Hal, were longing for the camaraderie of the trenches.

Those men formed an organization that has since become the largest all-Canadian service organization, an organization that has grown to 17,000 members in 585 Kinsmen Clubs, 470 Kinette Clubs and more than 400 auxiliaries in this country. Since 1938 the Kinsmen have had as their motto "Serving the communities greatest needs."

Mr. Speaker, since 1964 the Kinsmen have raised more than \$14 million for cystic fibrosis research. The last fiscal year alone saw the Kinsmen raise more than \$21 million for community projects.

There are several current and former Kinsmen seated among us. The Honourable Member for Minnedosa, Harold Gilleshammer, having the distinction of being a life member of the Association of Kinsmen Clubs, and I, myself, am proud to have served in my constituency as president of the Teulon Kinsmen. I have four Kinsmen Clubs in my constituency and I am very proud of the work they do.

At this time I would like to congratulate the many achievements of Kinsmen Clubs throughout Canada and throughout Manitoba in particular, and congratulate the Association of Kinsmen Clubs on the occasion of their 70th anniversary. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I would ask that Report Stage be called.

REPORT STAGE

BILL NO. 81—THE ENVIRONMENT AMENDMENT ACT

Mr. Speaker: Bill No. 81, The Environment Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'environnement, the Honourable Government House Leader.

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, if there is no debate on this Bill, I would move that the Bill be concurred in.

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Environment): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness), that Bill No. 81, The Environment Amendment Act be concurred in.

MOTION presented and carried.

BILL NO. 82—THE DANGEROUS GOODS HANDLING AND TRANSPORTATION AMENDMENT ACT

Mr. Speaker: Bill No. 82, The Dangerous Goods Handling and Transportation Amendment Act; Loi

modifiant la Loi sur la manutention et le transport des marchandises dangereuses, the Honourable Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Environment): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness), that Bill No. 82, The Dangerous Goods Handling and Transportation Amendment Act, be reported from the Standing Committee on Public Utilities and Natural Resources and be concurred in.

MOTION presented and carried.

BILL NO. 83—THE OZONE DEPLETING SUBSTANCES ACT

Mr. Speaker: Bill No. 83, The Ozone Depleting Substances Act; Loi sur les substances appauvrissant la couche d'ozone, the Honourable Minister of Environment.

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Environment): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Downey), that Bill No. 83, The Ozone Depleting Substances Act, as amended and reported from the Standing Committee on Law Amendments, be concurred in.

MOTION presented and carried.

HOUSE BUSINESS

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, would you be so kind as to call the second readings as listed on pages 1 and 2 of today's Order Paper.

* (1420)

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

BILL NO. 56—THE WORKERS COMPENSATION AMENDMENT ACT (2)

Mr. Speaker: On the proposed motion of the Honourable Minister of Co-operative, Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Connery), Bill No. 56, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act (2); Loi no 2 modifiant la Loi sur les accidents du travail, standing in the name of the Honourable Member for Thompson, who has 20 minutes remaining, the Honourable Member for Thompson.

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): Mr. Speaker, when I began my contribution on this debate in the last opportunity, I said that this is a flawed Bill. Indeed, I believe what has happened since that time has proven conclusively that it is a flawed Bill. When the Minister—I know probably, I believe, at the committee stage have to admit that, because I am expecting and I am hoping that there will be some significant amendments introduced to this particular Bill by the Government itself. Many of the provisions of the Bill have raised concern, particularly, I think it is worth noting, not just from injured workers, but also from companies as well,

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and the Minister acknowledges there will be significant amendments.

I just want to indicate that we have pinpointed a number of areas. I raised a number of them last time in which we will be bringing in amendments if the Government does not. We may amend some of their amendments if necessary in order to make sure that some of the difficulties that we have identified in the Act are not dealt with. I think that is important, because as I said this Bill was rushed in. It does not deal with the comprehensive range of changes that we believe are necessary in terms of Workers Compensation.

In particular it does not deal with the many recommendations of the Legislative Review Committee that remain outstanding. I want to indicate, Mr. Speaker, that even though we will be bringing in amendments if necessary at the committee stage, we are not satisfied with the degree to which this Bill goes. We believe this Bill should have brought in major changes to Workers Compensation based on the Legislative Review Committee.

I am disappointed that in essence it deals with, I would not call it housekeeping, that was an initial indication, Mr. Speaker. Some of the provisions in the Bill if they are not dealt with could have major ramifications. Really what we are saying on this Bill is what is as important as what is in the Bill is what is not in the Bill. There are a significant number of items that are not in the Bill.

I mentioned last time some of the concerns that I have and our caucus has about this Bill in terms of for example the board's structure. I indicated in particular this Government has been operating illegally in terms of the board's structure over the last six months. They have had a part-time chair. The legislation, Mr. Speaker, prohibits that. What they are doing with this Bill is really rubber-stamping what they have been doing for six months, and I believe that is unacceptable. I believe the Government should not have put in a chair on a part-time basis when the Act states, the chair shall be full time. I believe that has not resulted in the type of dealing with claims, the type of board policy development that we require. I indicated it is not just a question of that.

Mr. Speaker, there are serious concerns that we have about the structure of the board. We believe there are some real dangers in having some of the appointments basically put up for patronage appointment. It is not that I have objections to Governments appointing individuals who have similar policy positions to their own position in terms of boards and commissions. I am not suggesting that at all, but this is unique. This is the Workers Compensation Board. I believe it would be far better if there was a structure that allowed for labour on the one side, management on the other and truly objective community representatives on the third side. I believe this can be accomplished.

There are many ways of doing it. One way is to require some sort of approval process on appointments for community representatives on the part of the labour representatives and on behalf of management. That ensures that whoever is in place on the board from

the community is considered to be fair and essentially neutral, Mr. Speaker, because I believe that is important, and I discussed that last time during my contribution to this aspect of the debate. I have expressed concern about a number of other provisions in the Bill—the definition of accident. I am hoping that will be changed, that it will be amended.

I would like to address another area too which I believe is a serious omission in this Bill, and that is the fact that we do not have a provision in this Bill to bring back into force the regulations that existed in terms of firefighters. We have for many years, Mr. Speaker, provisions affecting firefighters that I would say are absolutely necessary, given the situation facing the hazardous workplace in terms of the exposure to hazardous goods, to the situation where they are exposed to situations that can cause cancer or heart attack.

Let us not forget what has happened. There were regulations in place. The regulations go back well over two decades in this province. The last version of those regulations was brought in by the New Democratic Party Government, the Schreyer Government, in the 1970s. It was struck down recently by the Court of Appeal in Manitoba by Justice Lyon. The ruling basically said that if the Legislature wanted to have this in force it should be in legislation. Mr. Speaker, what has happened is that we have seen quite clearly from the Minister that this is not being brought in this legislation on Bill 56 and I want to say that is unacceptable. That is absolutely unacceptable.

We believe that there need to be changes brought in to protect our firefighters and to bring in the same kind of protection they have had for more than two decades, Mr. Speaker. We will be discussing this at committee stage. We will be urging the Minister to bring in that kind of protection. I know the suggestion may be made that perhaps there are other workers who are deserving of the same type of protection. Indeed that may be the case, but why should this Government deny firefighters that protection because there may be possible other occupations that should have the same protection? Why do they not in this Session bring in the provision in terms of firefighters and deal with those provisions? Why do they not do that now and work on the development of protection for other workers in similar situations in the future? Let us not deny our firefighters of the rights that they have had in this province for more than two decades. I consider that a serious omission on the part of this Government.

I can indicate there are many other provisions of the Workers Compensation Bill that could have been introduced, based on the Legislative Review Committee. I do not want to review them in detail, because we do not have the time, but there are many provisions that were accepted by all three Members of the Legislative Review Committee. As I indicated in my opening comments, they were people on all sides of the spectrum in terms of labour-management, Brian King, the Chairperson, an injured worker himself.

The bottom line is, many of those recommendations have not been dealt with. We consider that to be unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. In fact what is happening,

that we are finding that is particularly of concern, is that the Government has not been bringing significant changes in via the way of legislation. We have seen changes brought in by the board on board policy that can have a very significant impact on injured workers.

I mentioned the experience rating system. I have indicated our concern about the way that system operates. It puts an onus on employers to have employees not report accidents, because that reduces their rates. That reduces the amount they pay for Workers Compensation.

The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is we are already getting reports from individuals in the workplace who are saying that pressure is being put on them not to report accidents. It is not that that pressure did not exist before, it did. It is documented. There are Members of this House—the Member for The Pas (Mr. Harapiak), I remember, told me once that he had a broken leg. His employer at the time in Sudbury took the position of getting him to go to work so he would not be counted as a lost-time accident. That is without the experience rating system. With the experience rating system it is going to become much worse.

* (1430)

I note, for example, this year there is some report that the level of accidents is down. I hope there will be a real decline in terms of accidents. I believe there is every possibility to improve safety in the workplace. I do not want to see accidents decline because they are not reported, because companies are putting pressure on injured workers not to report accidents, therefore, not leading to increased rates. I do not want to see that, Mr. Speaker. Once again, the frustration is that the Government has not brought this in, in legislation, it was brought in by regulation, by development of policy by the board.

I want to talk about another issue on Workers Compensation that I have very serious concerns about, Mr. Speaker. That is a concern related to the calculation of maximum earnings. The board has changed the policy. They have developed a policy that is going to hit very hard at many of my constituents, many of the constituents of other northern communities, many industrial workers, because what they are doing is they are considering maximum earnings to include all earnings, including, for example, bonuses and other forms of earnings that members in the workplace have had. I want to take this as an example of the type of situation that is going to develop because of the new policies of the Workers Compensation Board.

An individual working in the mine, at Inco in my constituency, becomes injured. Because of that injury the worker is off for a period of time, returns at another occupation, is unable to continue to be a miner. The individual before may have been earning \$40,000 in salary and \$10,000 or \$20,000 in bonus, a hard earned bonus, one that no one in this House—unless they have worked underground—can fathom in terms of the amount of work, the amount of effort, the commitment that it takes to get a bonus of that type.

What will happen is, they will return to the workplace, and if this policy is allowed to stand they will only be

eligible for the salary they were receiving. There will be no potential for them to receive compensation for the differential in wages. They may have been earning \$50,000 or \$60,000 prior to the accident, they may afterwards be earning \$35,000 or \$36,000, but because of this new policy of the board, and it is one that has not been well publicized, those individuals who before would have received a top-up in their income to reflect the loss of income that is a direct result of a workplace injury or accident will now face a substantial loss of income because of the fact the Workers Compensation Board is now going to be interpreting the provision in regard to loss of earnings as being a straight cap at the \$36,000 level.

I believe there are two things that the Government needs to do. First of all, changes like this should not be made at the board level. These are important changes. They should be done by legislation so that we as Members of the Legislature can debate them. Significantly what should be done is first of all, the maximum level of earnings should be raised to reflect what the reality is in terms of not just northern communities, but in many industrial areas here in Winnipeg as well, that is no longer a realistic level in many industries, particularly for skilled tradespeople. That needs to be raised.

The second thing though, Mr. Speaker, that has to be dealt with is the fact there should be provision for bonuses and other forms of income that should be reflected and should be recognized by Workers Compensation so that people do not face a dramatic loss of income. That is what is going to happen to my constituents, a dramatic loss of income if they are injured, if they are no longer able to earn what they previously earned, particularly those working underground, but many surface workers, as well. If they are working at a job receiving far less than they were receiving before, the bottom line in this particular situation is that they will be dealing with a major loss of income that could substantially hurt them in terms of their lifestyle. It could have a substantial impact on their families.

Those kinds of changes I said are unacceptable, those kind of changes should be brought to this House, they should be in legislation, they should be debated by Members of this House, Mr. Speaker, and we consider it absolutely unacceptable that those kinds of changes are being made now and that we as Members of the Legislature have virtually no ability to deal with some very significant changes in policy by the Workers Compensation.

(Mr. Neil Gaudry, Acting Speaker, in the Chair)

So, Mr. Acting Speaker, when I look at this Bill it is very clear, it is a flawed Bill. Some significant amendments are needed even to make this Bill worthy of any type of support. I am not saying there are not some positive provisions in the Bill. I have said at the beginning of my remarks, there are some positive provisions, but there are many flawed provisions and there also is a lot that is missing. There is a lot that is already happening at the board level that is not in this Bill that should be in this Bill, there is a lot that should be in this Bill. Many of the recommendations

of the Legislative Review Committee that should be in this Bill are changes that we cannot wait any longer for.

Let us not forget that the Legislative Review Committee made its report public nearly three years ago, nearly three years ago; nearly three years have gone by since that time.

An Honourable Member: That is the third time you said that.

Mr. Ashton: I wanted to mention it to the Minister responsible for Workers Compensation (Mr. Connery). Yes, I will say it three times, I will say it 30 times, I will say it 300 times so long as the Minister refuses to enact many of those changes, and let us not forget, once again for the Minister responsible for Workers Compensation, that those provisions, the vast majority of them, 95 percent of them, were accepted by all three Members of the Legislative Review Committee. There was consensus that existed, there was an implementation team in place, recommendations had been developed, the vast majority of the LRC, the Legislative Review Committee, provisions had been discussed. While I think anyone can understand that a new Government requires some time to deal with it, even if something is in progress I believe that is a fair enough situation, Mr. Acting Speaker.

The fact is that we were looking at some substantial changes in 1988, the 1988 Session. We are dealing here in 1990 with a Bill that does not even begin to scratch the surface in terms of some of the significant changes that have still not been made. I said before, Mr. Acting Speaker, changes have been made administratively, but what is missing are some of the significant changes that we require to this Act, The Workers Compensation Act, to bring in many of the legislative changes.

With those comments, Mr. Acting Speaker, we will be debating this Bill in committee. We will support its passage through on second reading, but I want to make it very clear and on the record that we do so recognizing the serious faults of this Bill. We will not vote against this Bill because we believe there are some positive provisions. We believe that some of the major negative features of this Bill can be corrected at committee. What it is going to require is some sense of commitment from the Minister and the Government to listen.—(interjection)— The Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Downey) says there is. I hope that is the case.

Let us not forget the bottom line here is the situation facing injured workers and their families, Mr. Acting Speaker. I believe that we have the opportunity, a golden opportunity, to bring in changes, to make a substantial improvement in the livelihood of injured workers and their families. We have that opportunity, but we have to be willing to listen to them, whether it be on this committee on Bill 56 where I hope people will listen, or whether it be on Bill 31 where I hope the Liberals and Conservatives will listen once again to ordinary people, or on Bill 42 when we do go into committee on that which affects landlord and tenant rights.

I could go through the list of Bills, Mr. Acting Speaker, because the bottom line is up to us now to listen to

the concerns of the working men and women of this province, the injured workers and their families. Now is our opportunity. That is why yesterday we passed through a number of Bills. We want to get into committee to hear those proposals. That is why we will be passing Bill 56 through, because we want to get into there.

Let the process be allowed, Mr. Acting Speaker, to go to its fullest extent. Let us have the public make its presentations, but let us have a commitment from all Parties to listen to members of the public. I have not sensed that commitment unfortunately on many Bills that are now before committee. I have not seen that, for example, from the Liberals or the Conservatives on final offer selection. They are not listening as people come into the committee and make their views known.

I consider that to be most unfortunate because these, Mr. Acting Speaker, are people that we should be listening to first and foremost. Let us open our ears, let us open our minds, whether it be on Workers Compensation, final offer selection, or Bill 42 that would deal with the disgusting slum conditions in many areas of our province. Those are just three Bills. There are other Bills that also can have some significant impact, but only if there is a real commitment to listening to the people who are going to be making presentations in committee.

I want to say that our caucus is listening, Mr. Acting Speaker. We are listening on final offer selection, on Workers Compensation, on landlord and tenant affairs and many other issues. That is why yesterday we said we want to go to committee, so the voice of the people of Manitoba could be heard on these important Bills. That is why on this Bill today we are also saying it is time to go to committee, it is time to listen to the people, to the injured workers and their families and follow through on the legislative process it should be.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to address what I hope will be a Bill whose flaws can be corrected and a Bill that will get the message across to the Government that we need far more changes, far greater reform to Workers Compensation in the future. Thank you, Mr. Acting Speaker.

Mrs. Gwen Charles (Selkirk): Mr. Acting Speaker, last week, as in many weeks, we have—the light is flashing here. Is this indicating that the mike—thank you. Last week, and the Minister responsible, or supposedly responsible, for Workers Compensation (Mr. Connery) is spending his time heckling across the room. I would like to explain to him that one day last week we had nine—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh!

* (1440)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): Order, please; order, please.

Mrs. Charles: In one day last week in my constituency office, we had nine people come in with Workers Compensation claims. Would the Minister please listen?

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I would not mind his attention. Nine claimants came in on Workers Comp—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): Order. The Honourable Minister for Northern Affairs, on a point of order.

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Northern and Native Affairs): Mr. Acting Speaker, I would appreciate it if the Member would continue with her speech and not reflect on my colleague as to whether or not he is listening or is not. It is recorded in Hansard as the Member should know by now. If he does not listen, there is a full opportunity to read it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): The Honourable Member does not have a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

The Honourable Member for Selkirk.

An Honourable Member: How does she know I am not listening?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): Order, please.

Mrs. Charles: This is exactly the lack of respect that workers receive at Workers Compensation. Now I know why, because the Minister has the same lack of respect for people in this House.

Hon. Edward Connery (Minister responsible for The Workers Compensation Act): On a point of order, I will not tolerate the Member for Selkirk saying that they do not get respect at the Workers Comp. Those 300 people work hard for injured workers. She should be ashamed and she should withdraw those comments right now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): A dispute over the facts is not a point of order. The Honourable Member for Selkirk.

Mrs. Charles: Mr. Acting Speaker -(interjection)- if the Members across the way would shut up—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): Order, please; order, please. I will not tolerate this in the Chamber. The Honourable Member for Thompson.

Mr. Steve Ashton (Second Opposition House Leader): On a point of order, I do believe we are debating a Bill. I believe that the Bill is Bill 56. It might assist, if perhaps we could ask the speaker to be able to speak to the Bill, but ask other Members to allow her to speak. I do believe we are straying from the purpose of the debate. I would love to get into this, Mr. Acting Speaker, myself, as Workers Compensation Critic, but I do believe we should perhaps get back to the normal debating process.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): Thank you. The Honourable Member for Selkirk.

Mrs. Charles: Mr. Acting Speaker, I was trying to tell the Minister that in one day last week we had nine claimants come to our office with problems with Workers Compensation. Usually every day we have one, sometimes two, occasionally three or four, but nine is outstanding. I would hope the Minister would take with some serious recognition the situation that must exist when nine people independently have to come into an office of this House in order to get help in receiving their due claims in Workers Compensation.

Let us go over a few of—why these people did not receive their claims. One we sent over to welfare because his family was going hungry and in phoning up Workers Compensation—why was his claim not paid out? Was he due it? Yes, he had a broken leg. He was due his cheque from Workers Compensation, but the file had been left on the desk while somebody went on vacation for two weeks. It took two weeks to open the file, two weeks while the person was on vacation and meanwhile this family is going hungry, and this Minister is trying to say that I am not concerned about the workers in this province. I am indeed concerned about the workers of this province, and I am indeed concerned with the problems at Workers Compensation.

The other two files that we opened that week were also claims—actually three files—two were lost in the filing system, which nobody seems to understand, and one which was eventually found in an old file drawer, which we came back with the report from the adjudicator saying we have no idea why it got into that filing drawer. This is the attitude we put up with day in and day out with Workers Compensation. As of today, we received a letter from Workers Compensation withdrawing increases in a pension that was guaranteed in a letter in 1984 to a worker in the vicinity of the Town of Selkirk.

Workers Compensation has not improved. We have workers in the system who will independently on the phone ask us—and I will not repeat the phrases because it would be asking for bodily harm to be done to the Minister—to do things to the Minister, that are not fit to repeat in this House, because of the frustrations they have in trying to deal with a process that his department allows to continue.

I do not think anyone in this House realizes how quickly you are susceptible to the whims of the economic struggles that we each know exist out there but how quickly we can have our own support network fall to pieces. I have seen many, many hard working people come through my office door in tears because they cannot get their cheque from Workers Compensation, and time after time it is not because they are not due the claim but because they have lost the file. Of course the filing system is such that we only pull out the file physically from the rack of files at Workers Compensation so you cannot follow any file through.

The Minister is showing his indication of how much he supports wanting to listen to the problems that in my constituency we have and I am sure in other

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constituencies—I have certainly had other Members here. There is no reason why, when you ask an inquiry on a file for a worker in Workers Compensation, you should have to have it physically pulled from the list so that because an inquiry has been made it goes back to the back of the pile and the claim is delayed one more time. There is no reason why workers who go to have their claims processed have to be treated as if they were insignificant people and just a number.

There is no reason why, when you have been guaranteed a pension with increases at the rate of cost of living, and with the increase and the rate of disability as it increases over the years as they pass, that we should allow Workers Compensation to withdraw what was once guaranteed in a letter.

I hope the people involved in this one particular case will take it through the law system in order to sue Workers Compensation for withdrawing guarantees that were given to them in a letter on Workers Compensation letterhead and now is being withdrawn because they are deeming that the injury is not taking place any more or is not increasing in severity because the worker is no longer employed. He lost his employment due to the injury in the first place, and the letter from 1984 indicates that further increase in disabilities can be expected. If at that point the doctor proves that the disability had increased, then the Workers Compensation would increase the benefits accordingly. That was guaranteed in a letter, and this Minister's department is withdrawing that guarantee.

I just hope the Minister will see fit to care enough about this case when it comes to his attention in the name that he will understand that these types of problems have to be dealt with in a humane way. You cannot guarantee them one year and withdraw it the next year and expect anybody to have faith in the system.

Mr. Acting Speaker, the costs for these mess-ups at Workers Compensation are to us all and certainly to the residents in any community that will have to support these workers who now have to go on welfare. Of course we all know that those who pay taxes in every municipality pay it on their realty tax. That is not necessarily as fair as an income tax in that we all have houses and the better we increase them in value the more we are taxed.

Everybody is taxed in the Town of Selkirk and every other community by Workers Compensation. When they go on holidays and leave files on their desks and then have people having to go on our town welfare and be asked to pay these people on welfare rather than have them supported through Workers Compensation or the Province of Manitoba according to the merits of their case, I wish I could say that Workers Compensation has improved. In some cases the appeal system certainly has. Where that has happened, I wish to congratulate the people involved in that improvement.

When it comes to the worker coming through the door at the corporation headquarters, there is no difference. According to the reports I have from the workers that come in my constituency office, they are still being treated shabbily. They are not given any

respect for the injuries they have had occur. We continually have Workers Compensation doctors overrule specialists.

In one case, even though the doctor had put this person's leg in a cast and had said that he was to be off work for a period of four to five weeks, Workers Compensation said he did not have a broken leg so therefore he could not be compensated. It was not a broken leg. They did not bother to look at the doctor's report. They just wanted to read into it what they had and that -(interjection)- no, they did not look at his leg either, even though it was in a cast. They do it over the telephone and just say, he does not have an injury, therefore we are not going to compensate him.

When we phone up the doctor and have the report verbally read to us, phone back Workers Compensation and indicate perhaps they should read the doctor's report, they go, oh, well, I guess we overlooked that and now they are sending out the cheque. There is no reason anybody should have to come into their representative's office in order to receive due justice that they have in the process that is before them. They do not receive a fair treatment at Workers Compensation.

* (1450)

I wish to tell the Minister this in all honesty that he has to continue to look into the system that is at Workers Compensation and hope in no way that he has ceased working towards bettering it, because it is a failed and flawed system that continually uses the weak and the vulnerable to put them at the mercy of the bureaucracy that exists. I do not wish to indicate that these people, the adjudicators and the staff there personally, are out to be mean or nasty to any person. I would expect that the system itself causes these workers to be so overworked and so frustrated with the system that they cannot give back the respect to the people that they should have.

Mr. Acting Speaker, this Bill has its merits and it has its faults. I would like to go over that line by line when we get into committee, but I want the Minister most of all to know that he cannot expect that this Bill is going to improve the morale at Workers Compensation. That is his duty and is under his charge. If he allows it to continue, then he is responsible for the case that exists there. Workers Compensation is a mess and this Minister is responsible for it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I believe the Minister of Workers Compensation is wanting to close debate. We still have speakers that would like to speak on this.

Mr. Gulzar Cheema (Kildonan): Mr. Acting Speaker, I will be very brief. I just want to address some of the issues. I think this Bill No. 56 will definitely go a long way to help the workers, but there are a number of problems I want to bring to the attention of the Minister. I think the No. 1 problem is the time period when the patient is seen by a physician and the time when they get their first cheque. The time period is usually anywhere from 2 to 3 weeks, and that causes hardship. I do not think this Bill is going to address that.

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A second problem which most of the workers are saying in my area and other areas is their inability to get hold of their adjuster which is at times very difficult. They keep on calling them, they write them letters, but there is no response, or usually the response is wait for another 10 days, the file has gone from one place to another, and their cases are lost.

Mr. Acting Speaker, many workers have lost their houses, they have lost their cars and other problems in family life which is terrible. I think that has to be answered. We know the Minister does not have power over that, because the Workers Compensation Board are ultimately responsible. The Minister has been helpful in a number of cases to solve, and we have been given a few officers to get hold of them, but the problem is not resolved yet.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I want to address that many workers, some of them whose primary language is not English, they are having a problem to communicate with adjusters. I am told that not more than one personal adjuster can speak another language. That is extremely important because unless you speak the language, how are you going to know their problems? At times they are using interpreters. I think we should be concentrating on hiring some people who would have knowledge of other languages, so that they can solve some of the problems. Not only are we wasting tax dollars at the Compensation Board, but also we are wasting tax dollars in the long run, because these people undergo a lot of stress and they cannot seem to reach anyplace.

I think a number of problems could be resolved because we all get the compensation cases from all of the constituencies. I am sure the Member for Portage (Mr. Connery) does get the same number of cases. At times it is very frustrating because he is not in charge here in the real sense, it is the Workers Compensation Board who makes the final decision.

The second problem which many patients are facing and the physicians face is that the person sees the physician for the first time, and if that report does not go in favour of the Compensation Board, the Compensation Board does not look favourably to that report. I think that does not really serve the purpose. They appoint their own physicians, and I think they are looking for a favourable report in terms of the Compensation Board, but not looking after the workers as such. I think that is not a reasonable way of solving the problem, because you are first of all prolonging the whole issue for as long as 18 months in some cases.

Mr. Acting Speaker, it can only be solved if we have set guidelines. There should be reasonable doubt given to prove from the worker, because I would say all the workers are not there to cheat the Compensation Board, but they want to get what is due for them. They have paid their dues and the companies paid their dues, but the system is still far from perfect. I would request the Minister to look into the issue of hiring new adjusters who would know the language barrier, and I think that will help us a long way.

Secondly, I want to address the issue of the new program started by the Compensation Board. That is

the back injury program and that seems to be working fine. It has a perfect model that the Compensation Board will try to put this worker back to work with a back injury as soon as possible and they are going to allocate the nurses who will be trained at the work level. I think that will help to bring the worker back to the force as soon as possible. With that I will end my comments and I will request the Minister to look into two specific issues.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Acting Speaker, I too would like to put a few words on the record regarding this particular Bill. I find it somewhat frustrating in terms of the approach the New Democratic Party in this Chamber has taken when it comes to the workers of this province, in particular the workers who are injured at work. If we take a look at what this Bill is and what this Bill is all about, we will see that it is to the benefit of all the workers, all the injured workers, in the long term. This is a Bill that has been standing in the name of the New Democratic Party for a number of, not days, not weeks, but months.

When we had an opportunity to speak on this Bill, we did that. After initially speaking on this Bill, addressing some of our concerns through the Member for Radisson (Mr. Patterson), the then third Party of this Chamber stood the Bill much like they have stood every Bill in this Chamber and have held up passage for whatever political reasons and rationale that they have had. Mr. Acting Speaker, the same principle applies to all Bills in this Chamber when it comes to Government Bills.

This type of obstruction that the NDP have been putting on us also hurts the worker. It also hurts those that are in most need, those that have injured themselves at work. The most frequent call I get as an MLA, at least in the first 18 months of serving this Chamber, have been from injured workers requesting some type of assistance in getting their claim processed in what would be a timely fashion.

* (1500)

When they come up to—in terms of the Estimates process, the Minister of Workers Compensation (Mr. Connery) had stated that he would be willing to field questions regarding Workers Compensation even though the NDP had passed the Minister's Salary. Mr. Acting Speaker, we were wanting to ask questions indeed and the Minister was indeed wanting to give us some answers in terms of what has been going on in Workers Compensation. Yet we had the third Party of this Chamber standing up and objecting and not wanting the official Opposition to get anything on the record in terms of what we feel is in the best interest for Workers Compensation Board to proceed. Last night I believe the NDP have done it once again. At least the official Opposition has gotten on the record some questions pertaining to the current status, the legislation that we now have before us and how it is going to be affecting injured workers across the province. I think really that is what we have to look at.

I have had a number of constituents, as I have pointed out, who have come to me. One night, it was after

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eleven o'clock in the evening, I had a constituent who gave me a call and had broken down into tears on a Friday evening. The Saturday I sat down with this particular lady and we went over some of the problems that she was having because of the tremendous backlog. Mr. Acting Speaker, we had people waiting an unnecessary and unforgivable period of time. This particular individual was waiting eight months, and it was not even at the review committee process.

Our constituents have regular payments. They have time payments in terms of mortgages, monthly bills and things of that nature that have to be met, and the backlog over at Workers Compensation which was created through the NDP has not been cleared up. When it comes to addressing the problem, this particular problem, whether it is through legislation that will no doubt assist in some manner, we find once again that they feel it is their right to be able, using their political motives and options, to hold up what would benefit the workers of our province, the injured workers of our province.

I have to ask why the Government has not seen fit to put a higher priority on this Bill. For day after day after day we had Bill 31, final offer selection, called up on the top of the Order Paper. For day after day after day we had other Bills go well in advance of the Workers Compensation Bill and then, Mr. Acting Speaker—

An Honourable Member: Relevance.

Mr. Lamoureux: The Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Downey) says to be relevant. This is indeed relevant. The Bill is pertaining to changes, comprehensive changes to The Workers Compensation Act. We are talking about how these changes can be taking place, and that is speaking to the changes. If the Conservatives feel that they have a point of order, have them stand up and make their point of order, otherwise to stay in their seat and listen to what we in the official Opposition have to say.

An Honourable Member: The only way you guys will stay in power, like cutting deals with weasels.

Mr. Lamoureux: The Member for Springfield (Mr. Roch) is quite correct, that the only way this Government will stay in power is through coalitions of the sort that we saw yesterday. I would be interested in finding out there last night, I would be interested in finding out the type of deals that this Government makes with the third Party in order to prop it up. Mr. Acting Speaker, was this part of the deal, that they would pass Workers Compensation? Who knows what that deal was.

I think that this Government is scared, that this Government was scared of the official Opposition asking questions. What does this Government have to hide? What is it that they are so scared of that they felt that if I was to ask questions regarding Workers Compensation, regarding any other topic that affected the injured workers in the province or in my riding, what are they so afraid of that they had to do it in the manner in which shafted Members of the official Opposition? What are they scared of? Why did the

NDP not have any questions? Were they content with all the answers that they received?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): Order, please. I would like to remind the Honourable Member to keep relevance to the Bill.

Mr. Lamoureux: Workers Compensation came up, Mr. Acting Speaker, in the Estimates process.—(interjection)—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): Order, please.

Mr. Lamoureux: During the Estimates, you will find that this Bill was referred to, and that this Bill will have a dramatic effect on the expenditures of this Government. What I am calling into question are the motives of this Government and the motives of the third Party in this House.

I am suggesting to you that the Government is scared, that they do not want to answer questions that the official Opposition wants to put on the record and that the third Party in this Chamber maybe wants to get out of this Session. They do not have any—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): Order, please; order please. I would like to remind the Honourable Member to keep relevance to the Bill. I would like the other side of the House to keep quiet also. Thank you.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Acting Speaker, getting back to the lady who had actually come to my home on a Saturday. She was concerned—

An Honourable Member: That was a Friday night, if I remember correctly.

Mr. Lamoureux: To the Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Downey), yes, it was the Friday night—I did not know if he was really paying attention. The Friday night, she had given me a call because of this Government's inaction on improving the conditions at Workers Compensation, on this Government's inaction of making this particular Bill a higher priority so that we could be solving some of the problems at Workers Compensation.

As a result, we have constituents such as the one that I am pointing out who gave me a call late on a Friday evening in which I arranged to meet her on the following day to hear what this Government and the previous NDP administration had put her through that no Manitoban should have to be put through.

If the Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Downey) wants to take this lightly, albeit, but this is not a light issue to those who are affected by this particular Bill. This is a very serious Bill that does not deserve the put off that the NDP have put on this Bill, the holding up of this particular Bill and why they refuse to let it go to committee, Mr. Acting Speaker, for their political alternatives.

In meeting with this lady on the Saturday, she had told me about the cottage that she had to sell because she had to maintain payments in terms of her mortgage

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payments, her regular monthly bills. She told me that she was going to have to sell her van in the next two weeks unless some type of decision was going to be made. She was not even at the review stage yet. The backlog was completely unacceptable, Mr. Acting Speaker.

This particular piece of legislation through recommendations, through a large number of recommendations—and that is what this Bill is based on, a large number of recommendations that were brought forward to the Government—I believe will go a far way in ensuring that the Workers Compensation will work in a much faster manner.

The people whom we have working at Workers Compensation currently are all very competent individuals. I do not envy the position that this administration and the previous administration had put them in. It is no doubt a tremendous amount of pressure, and I would not myself want to be on the receiving end of telephone calls from people who are in dire straits, people who need the money in order to make payments, people who are being turned away from this uncaring, heartless Government and being forced to go and collect, whether it is provincial economic security or City of Winnipeg welfare. I do not think any one of us in this Chamber would like to be put in that type of a situation.

My intentions were not to hold up this legislation. Actually, I would have liked to have seen it passed back last November. I would have liked to have seen it go into committee in fact last November, much like other Bills that we would like to see in committee and in particular Bill No. 42. On that note, I would hope that after I sit down that the Minister, unless Members of the Opposition or in fact any Government Members would like to speak and put some remarks on this particular Bill, that the Government Minister will close debate and in fact we will see this Bill go into the committee process. Hopefully, the Government will be calling it in a very quick fashion. Thank you, Mr. Acting Speaker.

HOUSE BUSINESS

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): A point of order, Mr. Acting Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): On a point of order, the Honourable Minister of Justice.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Acting Speaker, I wonder if the Honourable Member for Interlake would allow me one moment just to make a couple of committee announcements.

* (1510)

The Standing Committee on Public Utilities and Natural Resources will meet on Thursday, the 1st of March at 10 a.m. to consider Bill No. 84. The Law Amendments Committee will meet on Thursday, March 1 at 8 p.m. to consider the following Bills: 65, 70, 71, 40, 6, 39, 66, 68, 69.

I thank the Honourable Member for his indulgence.

Mr. Bill Uruski (Interlake): Just before I go into my remarks, on a point of order, the Public Utilities is meeting tonight. Would those Bills that he has indicated—it is not meeting tonight? That is a change? I know it is a different Bill. I am only asking, if there will be no public representations on the Bill in question, or if the Minister is expecting public representations on Bill No. 84, is it possible that it might be dealt with by committee tonight? That is the point I am raising.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Acting Speaker, I suppose the problem connected with that is the availability of the Honourable Minister of Environment (Mr. Cummings). I think it is the Environment, to deal with Bill No. 84. He is available on the Thursday but apparently not this evening. That is the reason for the timing.

BILL NO. 56—THE WORKERS COMPENSATION AMENDMENT ACT (2) (Cont'd)

Mr. Bill Uruski (Interlake): Mr. Acting Speaker, I would like to just put a few comments with respect to this Bill dealing with the amendments to The Workers Compensation Act. All Members of the Assembly can rise and detail problems and issues that arise with respect to Workers Compensation. There are and there have been serious concerns with respect to the legislation.

I would like to raise one issue with respect to the legislation. I find the Conservatives very silent on this issue. That comes about as a result of the question of financing and the way Compensation Board accounts for its finances. If you recall two years ago, the question of financing in Workers Compensation was a major issue, because Conservatives said that this corporation was in the hole of several hundred millions of dollars, and in fact the corporation was not going to get out of the hole and it was being mismanaged.

Mr. Acting Speaker, virtually nothing has changed in respect to the way the corporation accounts for its funding, and everyone knew that in terms of the long-term liability the corporation was solvent provided that the necessary premium adjustments were made on an annual basis in fact to deal with the long-term contingency liability that the corporation required. I find it passing strange that Conservatives have now sat quiet on the question of financing with respect to Workers Compensation.

I also noted the comments of the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) with respect to this legislation. He was somewhat critical of Members of the NDP of somehow stalling this legislation.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I went down to the Clerk's Table there while the Member was speaking and I note, Sir, that while their spokesperson made his speech on November 17, the Bill was not called again until January 17, at which time the Member for The Pas (Mr. Harapiak) took the adjournment from the Member for Radisson (Mr. Patterson). The Bill was not called until January 17 and it was stood by the Member for The Pas. On February 22 the Bill was called for the second time, at which time the Member for The Pas spoke. He stood

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the Bill only once and he spoke on the next occasion that it was called with the Member, our House Leader, the Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), taking the adjournment. Of course the Bill was spoken to by the Member for Thompson today when it was called and it was stood yesterday, I believe; it was called yesterday and it was stood. The Member for Thompson spoke today, the 26th, four days after the previous speech.

Mr. Acting Speaker, so much for the argument and the debate that somehow this piece of legislation was in fact stalled, because we know that if Bills wanted to go through, the Government did not wish to grant leave, the Bill, either the Member spoke or would have had to in fact give up his or her right to speak on the legislation. So much so for the debate on holding the Bills in question.

Amendments are required to this piece of legislation. We want to move it to committee and hear the representations that will be on this legislation.

Hon. Edward Connery (Minister of Co-operative, Consumer and Corporate Affairs): I would like to conclude debate on Bill 56 before it goes to committee.

I would like to say that I appreciate the comments of the Member for Kildonan (Mr. Cheema) who made some good comments, some good suggestions which we as a Government, I as the Minister, am always prepared to listen to.

I am, and I cannot say how much I despise and reject and am fed up with the insidious words of the Member for Selkirk (Mrs. Charles). I think her comments are despicable, her actions are despicable. To say that the weak and the vulnerable are used by the Workers Compensation Board is a disgrace to her, a disgrace to every Member of this House and a disgrace to the people that work at the Workers Compensation Board.

That Member should be ashamed of herself because I am ashamed of her. She shakes her head and she says no. If that is the kind of conduct we get out of Selkirk no wonder we turfed Howard Pawley, and I will tell you that you are the next one to go.- (interjection)-

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): Order, order.

Mr. Connery: Mr. Acting Speaker, she says that the -(interjection)-

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): Order, please; order, please.

Mr. Connery: We have brought on additional staff at the Workers Compensation. We have brought on additional adjudicators. While the Member for Wolseley (Mr. Taylor), the sandbox kid, is chirping up over there he could have got up and put words on the record if he had wanted to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): Order, please; order, please. I would remind the Honourable Member that all Members are honourable.

Mr. Connery: Mr. Acting Speaker, the staff at the Workers Compensation Board have gone the full mile

to make this a very viable operation to service injured workers, people injured in the workplace. They have worked extremely hard to do that. I am very proud of the effort they have put in. Now we have not said that we have achieved all of the goals that we want, nor will we -(interjection)-

If the Member for Selkirk (Mrs. Charles) and the Member for Wolseley (Mr. Taylor) would like to put more words on the record I would sit down while they did. I am in the process of ending debate on this Bill.

An Honourable Member: Mr. Acting Speaker, on a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): The Honourable Member for Selkirk, on a point of order.

Mrs. Charles: I would be very pleased to speak again on Workers Compensation if the Minister wishes me to do so.- (interjection)- Well, he asked me if I wanted to.

Mr. Connery: She talks about incompetence and she talks about people not doing the job. Where was the Liberal Party last night when they could have asked questions on Workers Compensation when we came to the concurrence Bill? They were not in the House. They were out having a good time—

* (1520)

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): Order, please; order, please. I will not tolerate this kind of debate in the House. The Honourable Minister for Consumer and Corporate Affairs.- (interjection)- Order, please.

Mr. Connery: Mr. Acting Speaker, I can tell you that -(interjection)- the Member for St. Vital (Mr. Rose) says we will never be in Government, but we seem to be there already. Well, I guess maybe he is hoping to be in Opposition some day, but he is already there and will never get beyond that.

We have, at Workers Compensation, put in place a chief executive officer and an administrative staff that has worked very diligently to turn around the Workers Compensation. Some of the staff that the previous Government put on the I-Team have been hired because of their competence to work at the board to bring in place a system that will respond very quickly to the needs of injured workers and people that have suffered disease in the workplace.

I can tell you that the wait for review at the appeals commissioner's level is down to three months on the average to get a reply or a decision. They can get an appointment right now, because there are openings for people to go to the appeals commissioner.

We also have an early intercept team for those who are obviously not a difficult case, that they will get a

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cheque within maybe two weeks or three weeks. Mr. Acting Speaker, I think that they brought the average level down tremendously. We have a new facility on Portage Avenue for new employment services and rehab facilities for those that are looking to be re-employed. We have people there to assist them, to fill out their resumes, to look for jobs that they are capable of doing. The rehab is working with them to get them back first of all into their original workplace. That is the goal of the Workers Compensation, but that not being the case, to find other jobs.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I have met with all of the unions in Manitoba that were invited to sit down and go over with me their concerns of Workers Compensation. We made out a long list of the things that they were concerned about, and we are addressing them. The Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) says that there 178 recommendations in the King Report, and yes, I agree. Most of them were unanimous, but a matter of fact, most of those now have already been implemented either through legislation or through policy or practice, so there are very few recommendations of that one that has not been completed.

So, Mr. Acting Speaker, while we have some 50,000 claims at the Workers Compensation, 22,000 of them that are of a work loss nature, yes indeed, from time to time there will be a file that gets missed. Something will happen along that line, same as the Liberals missed being here last night and goofed up on their opportunity. Our staff will also make the odd mistake, and we continue to review that. My special assistant and I review all of the concerns that come to our office. If there is a pattern of a certain area, we speak to them at Workers Compensation. I can tell you the chief executive officer is very concerned that all of the failings or inadequacies that maybe are brought to them to correct them as quickly as possible.

We have in place a new board of commissioners, and after this legislation has passed, it will be tripartite with equal representation from the community at large, from the employers and from the employees. So, Mr. Acting Speaker, I resent the words of the Member for Selkirk (Mrs. Charles) left on the record, and I resent that she would leave any insinuation that staff would use the weak and the vulnerable. I cannot imagine a Member of this Legislature making comments of that nature. It is just not becoming to any Honourable Member of this Legislature, so her words speak for herself.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I am glad to see this Bill go to committee. I look forward to the presentations of the public and those interested, and we will review their comments to ensure that the Workers Compensation Board does the very best it can for those injured workers of Manitoba. Thank you.

Some Honourable Members: Question.

QUESTION put, MOTION carried.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): On the proposed motion of the Honourable Mr. Derkach, The Education Administration Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'administration scolaire, standing in the name of the Member for Interlake (Mr. Uruski).

It is the wrong one.

BILL NO. 59—THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS AMENDMENT ACT

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): On the proposed motion of the Honourable Minister of Education, Bill No. 59, The Public Schools Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les écoles publiques, standing in the name of the Honourable Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton).

Mr. Bill Uruski (Interlake): Mr. Acting Speaker, I will be speaking on behalf of our caucus, just saying a few words.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): Does the Honourable Member for Interlake have leave? (Agreed) The Honourable Member for Interlake.

Mr. Uruski: Mr. Acting Speaker, there are a number of changes in The Public Schools Amendment Act, Sir. Some of the changes that are now being put into law, and most notably for my benefit because I have a number of Frontier Schools within my own constituency. The movement of the Frontier School Division into, what one would say, the 20th century by having elected boards and recognizing what has been done over the last decade in terms of bringing the Frontier School Division into modern day terms, recognizing the boards, recognizing the work that all the community committees have done in this whole area is certainly a recognized positive move putting that into legislation. So that the amendments to The Public Schools Act in the broadest terms are acceptable and in fact we will likely be raising some questions in committee but, in the broadest terms, they are acceptable to us and we will allow this Bill to move to committee and hear presentations on it.

QUESTION put, MOTION carried.

BILL NO. 60—THE EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT ACT

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): On the proposed motion of the Honourable Minister of Education (Mr. Derkach), Bill No. 60, The Education Administration Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'administration scolaire, standing in the name of the Honourable Member for the Interlake (Mr. Uruski).

Mr. Bill Uruski (Interlake): Thank you, Mr. Acting Speaker. I wish to indicate that we do have some reservations with respect to this legislation as it is now proposed, sir. It appears to myself that the accountability portion of this Act is, putting it in the most layman's terms, it is flawed, Sir, it is not really there to accomplish

what I believe. If the Government wishes to accomplish accountability from the various sectors in the educational field dealing with private schools, et cetera, then this question really has to be addressed. If it is the Government's intention to say to the public that we are doing something by legislation and effectively not doing anything, then this legislation accomplishes just that.

So, Mr. Acting Speaker, we will find out in the committee whether this legislation is in fact the fluff that it is purported to be, or whether the Minister and the Government really mean what they are saying in this Bill, Mr. Acting Speaker, and we will see that when it goes to committee.

QUESTION put, MOTION carried.

* (1530)

**BILL NO. 98—THE MANITOBA
DATA SERVICES DISPOSITION AND
CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS ACT**

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gaudry): On the proposed motion of the Honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness), Bill No. 98, The Manitoba Data Services Disposition and Consequential Amendments Act; Loi sur l'aliénation de la Commission des services d'informatique du Manitoba et modifications corrélatives, standing in the name of the Honourable Member for Concordia (Mr. Doer). The Honourable Member for the Interlake.

Mr. Bill Uruski (Interlake): Mr. Acting Speaker, I wish to speak on this legislation, on this proposed Bill, purporting to seek authority of this Assembly to divest from the public domain a corporation that was set up, I believe, by previous Conservative administration. In fact, to create the Manitoba Data Services this corporation was set up by Sterling Lyon to actually consolidate all the various activities of data processing within Government under a single entity because the Government was faced during that period of time with a multitude of operations some of which were housed within the Manitoba Telephone System, some of which were housed in various Governmental departments, some of which were in fact all over through the bureaucracy.

With submissions for expanded programs, submissions for new capital expenditures in the field of computer hardware as it is known, the Government was faced, I venture to say on a weekly basis, of requests coming in from the various departments and agencies for expenditures and expansion of services that the Government made the decision; and what I would consider a wise decision during that period of time to bring together all the various entities in the computer field under one roof, bring forward the expertise within Governments, put it under the umbrella of a Crown agency, and put together all the services that could be provided to Government and put them under one roof and operate them centrally to bring about the kind of efficiencies that a central agency in fact can bring about at that point in time.

I say that point in time because at the time this corporation was brought in the whole technology field in terms of smaller sized computers, smaller hardware, the massive amount of data that could be stored in a very small piece of equipment was not able to be achieved so that the efficiencies of the day could in fact be achieved by having a central facility for the Government, and Manitoba Data Services was in fact created.

Mr. Acting Speaker, the Board of Directors of Manitoba Data Services, as it is now constituted, has a number of private entrepreneurs sitting on that board. In fact, the last time that board came to the Legislative Committee to report, it was very clear in my mind that the Board of Directors said to Members and to the public of this province that this corporation is among the finest of any public sector corporation in its field. It is operated with the most stringent business ethics, the most stringent of controls, the most stringent of cost component measurement. That is why in terms of the cost to the public of the data services that this corporation provides through the myriad of activities through the various governmental departments, it has been very clear that those costs have been going down to the users on an annual basis and the corporation has made millions of dollars in profit to the public, albeit, it is from within Government circles.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I note that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) did not hear my earlier remarks. The Minister of Finance gave me the scenario of taking from one pocket and putting into the other. That is essentially what he was saying. We do that in essence right now with accounting. We had the Provincial Auditor doing the accounting of most of the corporations and of the departments within the Government. The Provincial Auditor is a public servant, in effect a creature created by an act of this—(interjection)—well, the Minister of Finance says he is not going to privatize the Provincial Auditor.

That was done under Sterling Lyon. What we did then is rather than—and let us understand what we did—pay for the cost of the Civil Service and count the numbers, because that was the game of the '70s, that we wanted to show the public of Manitoba that we would reduce the number of civil servants and make the case that since we reduced the number of Civil Service, we could in fact give the taxpayers of this province a tax cut. That was the political rationale and the jargon of the day, that if you said that the numbers of civil servants was down and we reduced the numbers, we could then offer Manitobans a tax cut.

Mr. Acting Speaker, we did at that time, as the Minister of Finance is saying we are doing now, what we did is we contracted out. So, instead of paying for offices within the Civil Service, the same kind of overhead that any company requires, we did a little bit more. We not only paid for that, but we added a margin of profit to the private companies on the basis of contracting out. So what did we accomplish at the time? We did accomplish the reduction of Civil Service, but we did not reduce the cost to the public purse: We accomplished it by saying we will in fact hand it over to the private sector firms. We will pay for their overhead and we will put into place a margin of profit for them.

So I have to say we did not accomplish a heck of a lot, but we satisfied the political ambitions and in fact the ability of dealing with some of our political friends and making sure that they got contracts in the public domain, a basis of security, a basis in fact one could argue, Mr. Acting Speaker, at the basis of largess, at the expense of the public purse.- (interjection)- No, it is not a matter of even creative accounting, it is a matter of basically saying, we will give you some of the public welfare that is around. We will do it by contracting out. That in fact is what we did at the time.

On this one, this one has to have a little bit more finesse, because there is one difficulty that the Government has in this whole area. That is the difficulty with the confidentiality of records; that is the difficulty that the Conservatives have. This corporation now has and maintains confidential records in a number of areas on behalf of Manitobans. Mr. Acting Speaker, notwithstanding the Minister's comments that no company would in fact sign an agreement if they thought the Legislature could pass an Act detailing penalties for disclosure or for allowing of information that may leak out as a result of some misadventure within that corporation that they will not go into an agreement, I want to tell the Minister that any future Legislature will be able to bring in whatever law it deems appropriate at the time to deal with any infractions of confidentiality that may occur.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) better tell those two firms or how many firms he has that he is in negotiations with that he cannot give them that guarantee by virtue of the contract. Mr. Acting Speaker, there will be occasions that some future Assembly, some future Government through this Assembly, may want to pass a law to deal with actual breaches of confidentiality under this.- (interjection)- The Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) attempts to bait me and says, we will nationalize. Mr. Acting Speaker, it is not a matter of nationalization. The corporation is there in the public domain now. We have all paid for it, what are we going to nationalize? What we intend to do now is to privatize. We are going to privatize a corporation and allow it to be taken over for a number of reasons.

* (1540)

I want to go through the reasons that the Minister gave.- (interjection)- Pardon me? Yes, that is what I said, the former Sterling Lyon administration did something and centralized the computing services of the Government.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I want to go through the Minister's comments as to his rationale for the objectives of selling this corporation. He said some of his criteria that we will sell, continuance of existing MDS jobs, I hope so. I would say Manitobans would be outraged if in fact there was not the continuance of MDS jobs. I think that would be the height of stupidity on any Government, on any Minister of this Crown, to at least not allow that one little guarantee to be maintained.

The second criteria is that there will be a guarantee of significant new job creation. There can be some guarantee, but I want to tell you that will be very hard

put over any length of time. I say that because of the changing technology in the information base and I venture to say that beyond a decade no such guarantees would be provided. We will see what this Government is talking about when in fact those agreements eventually are tabled.

Mr. Acting Speaker, broadening of client source revenues to include national and international accounts—what is preventing MDS now from in fact going beyond the public sector clients that it maintains? If MDS and the Government itself, through its present board of directors, of whom on which sit some of the most, what I would say, experienced minds in the computer field in probably this province for sure and possibly within this country, have indicated this is a very efficiently run company that if you want to go out and seek business, nothing prevents us. Nothing except the Government prevents us by policy direction. That objective could be obtained by keeping the company where it is now. There are three sources of the criteria that have been put forward that can be accomplished by leaving that corporation where it is now.

The fourth one is to establish co-operative educational opportunities with Manitoba's universities. What is preventing MDS and the Government linking up with the schools of excellence in the computer science field at the University of Manitoba, University of Brandon or the University of Winnipeg and Red River Community College and all the educational institutions of higher learning in this province? What is preventing the Government from saying, yes, this is a field we want to pursue? We have some excellent staff and human resources in this province who are taking and investing their talents in the computer field and we will broaden the scope of MDS and go into this area. Nothing prevents this corporation from going that route.

Another one was position of new MDS technology through investment and product research and development. Nothing prevents MDS from expanding its horizon, though all of those last number of criteria, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) wanted to impress on us that somehow these doors will be open only if this corporation is privatized. Mr. Acting Speaker, it can accomplish all these objectives even if it is maintained as a public entity under the umbrella of the Government. All it needs is the policy directive to go ahead and expand into those areas.

Mr. Acting Speaker, let us understand where the difficulty comes into being. The difficulty comes into being when one does allow—and because public corporations tend to be on the headlines and scrutinized by the public much more broadly than private corporations are, then the difficulty comes in if some scope of their entrepreneurship gets into difficulty. Then you have all the political outfall in the papers, in this House. I mean, we have gone through it all.

I go through the history of the Manitoba Development Corporation, the Chinese food, the vegetable plant, the aircraft manufacturing and a whole host of adventures that originally were started by private entrepreneurs who came to the public and said we cannot make it on our own, we want public investments in these corporations. The board of directors provided those

loan funds and ultimately the projects did not succeed. The public ended up picking up those enterprises, repossessing on them, and the same difficulty can occur as occurred, for example, in MTX, MPIC. Absolutely, there is no doubt that occurs. The Government of the Day says we do not want to be involved in any of this political outfall and the political downside of having this corporation under the public domain, because it has been a profitable one.

Mr. Acting Speaker, you have two choices. You either continue that corporation as a profitable, topnotch corporation as it is reputed to be and leave it in a public domain under its present scope, and if you want private enterprise, so-called private enterprise, and provide that initiative, then give them the welfare, the grants, the support that you want to create the atmosphere for growth, if that is what they want.

* (1550)

I do not agree with it, Mr. Acting Speaker, but the fact of the matter is that is the name of the game across this country. It is competition between the public purse of one province versus another, or a province against the federal Government. That is what has occurred over the last several decades. It has not worked to the benefit of the taxpayers of any one area, but it certainly has benefited to some extent the pocketbooks of some large corporations in terms of the jobs that they have created.

Mr. Acting Speaker, to in fact divest itself of this profitable corporation that keeps private records on behalf of its citizens will be the Achilles' heel for this Government. I want to tell my honourable friends in the Conservative Party—and I believe that the Liberals are supporting this move, because while the Member for St. Norbert (Mr. Angus), he kind of was on one side and another on this issue, my reading of this is that the Liberals support the privatization move of this corporation. I believe that they will in fact support it along with the Tories.

Mr. Acting Speaker, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) as well indicated as one of his objectives that this corporation will be paying taxes to the Province of Manitoba, something it has never done.

Mr. Acting Speaker, all that the Minister of Finance has to do, by decree, is to say this corporation will pay all the taxes, no problem. What is preventing the Government from having MDS pay the taxes? MPIC pays its full share of taxes to the Province of Manitoba, to the City of Winnipeg, all its insurance taxes, as any other insurance company did, and the Province of Manitoba gains from that revenue, so what is preventing the Minister of Finance from decreeing that this corporation in fact will now pay taxes, or has not paid taxes to now?

Mr. Acting Speaker, in essence, I think what worries me about this piece of legislation and this move by the Conservatives, is that they had to bring in a Bill because they were not certain of their legal position because of the confidentiality of this Bill because they had to bring in this piece of legislation. There are two sections in this Act which are in my mind very key to this

transaction, or this proposed transaction, and one is of course that in case of a conflict between this Act and any other Act, this Act prevails to the extent of the conflict.

Mr. Acting Speaker, they are in fact making sure that in case they have missed something in their divestiture desires, they will have the authority clearly under their belt; and secondly, under The Legislative Library Act it is very clear that where the public interest so requires, the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council may direct that any public record in any department or agency or any public record transferred to the branch shall not be made available for public inspection for such period of time that the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council may designate.

Mr. Acting Speaker, in fact the very essence of my remarks, the confidentiality of records has to be broken by the section in this Act, Section 9, dealing with the storage and processing and the provisions regarding confidentiality required. The Government itself has to admit that it will and is prepared to release the information of private records that are kept in the public domain to a private corporation.

So, Mr Acting Speaker, the Government itself now by this Act is admitting that it has to break the laws of this province in order for this divestiture to go through, and that is very clear by the Bill that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) has in fact brought forward.

The Minister in his remarks talked about receiving unsolicited offers to purchase this company when they were approached. They wanted a thrust within a high tech area. Well, one just has to remember the thrust that the Government of Saskatchewan just went through into a high tech area, and a Conservative Government, a business-sense Government. You know, those Conservatives tend to tell people that they have real business sense.

You know what, Mr. Acting Speaker, they created, they invested was it not something like \$30 million into a translation company, a computer translation company that was going to translate all their English statutes into French, Sir, in the Province of Saskatchewan?

They invested this money and in fact there are some court cases in the Province of Quebec by the Japanese investors into this company by the entrepreneur from Quebec who went to Saskatchewan and really got himself a nice deal, a real sweetheart deal with the Government of Saskatchewan to operate a computer company.

You know, Sir, I am told, if all the news reports are correct, they have not translated one line of statutes into French, but the public of Saskatchewan spent millions of dollars of public money and said that they were interested in a thrust in a high tech area. I hope that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) is not one of those who is now going to take the entrepreneur skills from the Province of Saskatchewan and transpose them on the public of Manitoba to put into place a thrust into the high tech area and bring about the kind of investment that Saskatchewan got itself into, Sir.

I want to say that there is no hang-up on my part of taking a commercial entity of the public, and if it

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deemed be divested so be it, Mr. Acting Speaker, as it was done with Flyer, as it was done with Manfor. In fact some of those negotiations were going, but there is a difference in my mind, Sir, between those commercial entities and one that has been created, by a Conservative administration albeit, that provides complete and sole record-keeping for the public on a confidential basis and reports to the public. That to me is the major difference between this corporation and any other commercial entity and the Government's intent to divest.- (interjection)- The Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) says that they feel no ideological commitment to the devolution of Crown assets, instead from a rational policy objective we are using Crown divestitures as levers to significant economic development.

Manitoba has had a taste of Conservative economic policy of the '70s where Sterling Lyon said—and here we are having another round of this—we are going to place all our economic eggs in one basket. We are saying that all the jobs and all the so-called profitable jobs can only be created by the private sector, and so whatever is in the public domain no longer shall remain and should be transferred to the public sector.

What were the fruits of that Conservative ideology and Conservative economic policy of the late '70s and early '80s? Massive out-migration, Mr. Acting Speaker, high unemployment. This investment in the province we were ranking among the tops in investment in this province. During the four years of Sterling Lyon, investment fell, thousands of Manitobans left this province. You could practically go to any part of this province and speak with families and you heard stories of their children, their relatives, someone was moving. This province lost thousands of people by that ideology.

* (1600)

This Government is moving to in fact tie its hands very much so in putting its economic eggs in one basket. It is saying that, in essence, the public really does not know what it is doing, the public cannot perform a useful role in the economy, Mr. Acting Speaker, because that, in essence, is the arguments that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) and the Conservatives are putting forward.

I reject those arguments. The Government of Manitoba, through its financial levers, has played a very integral part in the economy of this province. It will continue to play an important part in the economy of this province and so it should because the economy of this province has been a mixed economy. If we have attempted to tilt it one way and say let us go the private way only, chaos has occurred, chaos, depression, outmigration, disinvestment, and the province and the people of this province have suffered.

So I say to my Conservative friends in Government, do not put your ideological blinkers on, do not keep them in place. Look at this corporation and expand it if you dare, and I say, if you dare, because I believe that if you look at what Conservative Governments across this country are doing and have done, with respect to public enterprises, I guess a good model

has been the Province of Saskatchewan, or even here, Mr. Acting Speaker, the good model here. We had the case of ManOil. We had, was it \$20 million of proven reserves in hand under ManOil? We sold \$20 million of proven assets for \$3 million.

(Mr. Speaker in the Chair)

Mr. Speaker, the sale, if you lower the cost of an asset, depreciate it and then say, well really it is not worth very much, you can virtually give it away. We have done that. You look at the Province of Saskatchewan where they have divested numerous corporations and of course it helped them in the short run. It did help their budgeting process in the short run. They were able to take the capital payback, apply it toward their deficit and make their books look good for a short period of time, but it took years and years for the people of that province to invest into their own province, to build up their economic base, their industrial base, their technological base by public investment into the various assets that they had. It took a very short period of time of an ideologically hidebound Conservative administration to sell off those assets, get rid of them, use the money to lower their deficit, and that is the end of the assets, Mr. Speaker.

It appears that this is in fact the kind of road that we are headed down by this piece of legislation and this divestiture. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance's (Mr. Manness) comments really tell true of the ideological philosophy and blinkers that they are under. I use his words when he spoke about the rights of private entrepreneurs in our economy.

I quote, I will read the entire paragraph: That is the essence of the divestiture of Manitoba Data Services. When the NDP particularly are opposed to it, what they are saying is that they are denying the potential of these fledgling companies in our midst who are trying to export within the smart industry. They are denying them a birthright to greater and greater economic opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, whose birthright is being denied? Whose birthright is being denied and at whose expense? No one's birthright is being denied. If someone's birthright is being denied then, we as a society are in fact paying a high price that we have to through our investment on behalf of society, have to in fact provide the security or the so-called birthright to a few private entrepreneurs. That is shortsightedness to say the least, that somehow as a society we have to provide the financial guarantees to a few entrepreneurs.

Mr. Speaker, is not true Conservatism dog eat dog, that if you invest a dollar and if does not make it you lose and no one else should in fact care that that happens? That is not what the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) is saying in his remarks. He is saying that we have to guarantee for these small fledgling firms their birthright. What about the people of the province's birthright, who invested by virtue of the election of their Members? In fact at the time it was Conservative Members who brought into being this corporation. Whose birthright is being sold out from under them because it is a profitable corporation? Is that in fact what we are doing by this venture?

There is a bit of a problem in what the Minister of Finance has said, because when he started his remarks, he started his remarks saying that we are dealing with four or more corporations, Mr. Speaker. Then they had something like eleven bona fide offers. We wanted to deal with firms globally, deal with firms who are operating all over this world on the one hand. On the other hand, he started talking about small firms within our own province.

Mr. Speaker, who will he be catering to? Is he saying that somehow the large firms will in fact bring about the prosperity to the small firms? Who is he trying to fool? Who is the Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness) trying to kid by statements like that, if that is what he meant? I venture to say, he did not. On the one hand, he said we are after the large firms, and on the other hand we are after the small firms. I am not sure which firms we are after. Perhaps he will want to clarify his statements. If his intent was that somehow those large firms if they buy out MDS will be the salvation and the springboard for Manitoba's small enterprise, he is not kidding anybody. He had better not, and if he is, I believe he is selling Members of this House very short because that is not true. That will not occur in the pure Conservative market economy. The big firms to do not give a damn about the small firms, and I think that is the difficulty that small business has had with the election of Conservative Governments. Many small businessmen have believed that somehow we are going to be big some day, so we have to go with the big boys, with the Conservatives, and we will prosper.

When the tough times come they are discarded just like dust off a table, and the Conservatives do not give a damn about those small-business people. They say this is free enterprise. They are right, I have to admit, when the Conservatives say, look, this is free enterprise, you invest a dollar, you lose it, tough luck, buddy, you fend for yourself. I happen to say that is fine if that is your philosophy, Mr. Speaker. Take your chances but do not believe or do not lead someone to believe that you are their friend in terms of economic support, that if you have a Conservative Party in Government somehow times will prosper, because that is not true. They will sell you down the road, and any small businessman who believe that is in fact selling himself short.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is recognition that the Government is breaking the law, that the Government is intent on breaking the law, but it goes beyond that. This Government is ideologically hidebound in its move to divest itself of Manitoba Data Services.

Mr. Speaker: On the proposed motion of the Honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness), is there leave that this matter remain standing in the name of the Honourable Member for Concordia (Mr. Doer)? The Honourable Member for Thompson.

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): Mr. Speaker, the Member for Concordia had hoped to speak on the Bill today, but I have received an indication that he does not want his name to remain on the Bill. I will be the last speaker from our caucus. He had hoped to speak earlier but had to leave.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave that this matter remain standing? No, okay. The Honourable Member for Concordia has lost his right to speak on second reading on Bill No. 98. The Honourable Member for Thompson.

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, the Member for Concordia had hoped to speak earlier, but because of the way in which we debated other Bills, was unable to do so. Our caucus has put a fairly clear position on the record. We have expressed our concerns about both the sale of MDS and also the particular Bill we are dealing with today. Quite frankly, I believe this is one of those Bills that once again indicates the difference in this House between our approach, our policies, our philosophy if you like, and the philosophy of the Conservative and the Liberal Parties.

The Liberals have been very clear on this issue, as they have unfortunately on a number of other Bills. They support the Conservatives. In this case they support the privatization of MDS. That has been very clear. I think if one peruses Hansard and looks at the comments that were made by the Member for St. Norbert (Mr. Angus), that is fairly clear too. We just heard today, as the Member for the Interlake (Mr. Uruski) was speaking, another indication from the Liberals that, yes, they support the privatization of Manitoba Data Services.

* (1610)

I believe, Mr. Speaker, it is one further example of how on some of the critical issues—and let us look at things in balance here. We have dealt with many Bills in this Session, close to 100. We are just dealing—as a matter of fact a Bill was introduced earlier today as part of the financial appropriations, Bill No. 99—99 Bills. Obviously many of them have not really had that much controversy surrounding them. We have discussed those. There are a number of Bills that we had introduced. We had been working on when we were in Government, which were later adopted, if you like, by the Conservatives, the wildlife Bill, for example, the groundwater protection Bill, a number of Bills in that category. So we had Bills of that nature where they were fairly routine Bills that virtually any Government could introduce.

We have had other Bills where perhaps there is some common ground or there could be potentially common ground where we have seen the need for significant amendments. I pointed to that earlier, for example, in terms of Workers Compensation. We are not voting against the Workers Compensation, even though we are not happy with it. That is because we are hoping that in a significant number of amendments the committee will salvage the Bill.

We have a number of Bills in that particular category, Bills such as Bill 79, for example, where there was general consensus on the need for reform to municipal assessment, but where there was significant difference in terms of how to approach that. In fact, we took the time on Bill 79 to deal with that, and what we did we introduced a record number of amendments. When I say we, it was in some cases the Government itself amending its own Act, but in other cases the Opposition

putting in amendments that salvaged what I believe was a flawed Bill and perhaps is a Bill which still has a number of flaws. Some of our amendments were, for example, ruled out of order, but once again it is in the category where there was broad consensus on sending the Bill to second reading, Mr. Speaker, one that was flawed but where the differences of opinion were over the type of Bill rather than the principle of the Bill, which leads me into the third type of Bill.

We see Bills of this nature in every Session. It is not a measure in terms of number of Bills, Mr. Speaker, because traditionally the majority of the Bills that we deal with are in either the first category as being non-controversial or the second where there is controversy more over the technical details, substantive technical details, but still some general concept of support over the intent of the Bill. For example, I mentioned reforming Workers Compensation or reforming municipal assessment, but the third category of Bill or the type of Bill that I would describe as being the Bills that go to the very heart of what political Parties are all about in terms of their philosophy, in terms of their policies, in terms of their ideology, if we want to use that word. We have seen in the number of Bills that be the case in this Session.

One obviously is Bill 31, which is currently before committee. It has very clearly delineated the position of the New Democratic Party which we have indicated very clearly that we do not want to see this combined effort of the Liberals and Conservatives who rolled back The Labour Relations Act. It has been quite clear in terms of the Liberal and Conservative positions.

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to debate that. Obviously we are not debating that particular Bill, but I use it as an example of where there is a substantial difference. It is the type of Bill in which people have to decide fundamentally, not just their philosophy and ideology but they have to answer the question: Whose side are you on in terms of a very important Bill? In this case, I mention Bill 31. Obviously the Liberals and Conservatives have echoed the position put forward at the committee and by people generally in terms of the Chamber of Commerce. We have supported the position put forward by many working people in this province.

I use that, Mr. Speaker, as a clear example of that type of Bill. This particular Bill is also in that category for the Minister of Cultural Affairs, because once again, each Party has indicated quite clearly its approach on a Bill that really is almost like a litmus test, if you like. It has tested the real bottom line political biases of the three political Parties.

Not surprisingly, the Conservatives brought in a Bill that would privatize a corporation, privatize a corporation, Mr. Speaker, that has been making money, has been very successful. Ironically, they are privatizing a Bill that was introduced—in fact the Manitoba Data Services, the history of that goes back to the Duff Roblin era. The Conservatives essentially established Manitoba Data Services as a Crown corporation, and now the Conservatives of the 1990s are privatizing it.

That is no surprise, Mr. Speaker, because the Conservative Party has undergone a significant change,

significant evolution in terms of its philosophy over the last number of years. There was a time that even Conservatives agreed with a need for public ownership in a number of key areas. It was Conservative Governments for example that nationalized Hydro and Telephones, not just in this province, but many other provinces. I would say since the departure of John Diefenbaker as their federal Leader, there has been a significant shift to the right on the part of the Conservative Party and an abandonment of the concept of the need for public ownership in many important areas.

We have just seen most recently with the election of a Conservative Government nationally how much the question of privatization is on their agenda. We have seen it with Air Canada. We have seen it in the most recent budget. We have seen that they have decided to privatize Petro-Canada, something that they would not even do in 1979. They talked about it at the time, but they backed off, Mr. Speaker. In the year 1990, the Conservative agenda of privatization is absolutely and fundamentally clear, that they are in favour of privatization.

The only question with the Conservatives is the degree to which they are willing to go and the speed in which they are willing to implement their policies. We have seen in Saskatchewan what a majority Conservative Government will do. In Saskatchewan they have moved against strong public opposition to privatize key elements of the economic fabric of that province. We have seen them move, Mr. Speaker, to demolish decades of progress, progress that has seen some of the most innovative, progressive developments economically because the people of the province have owned significant Crown corporations.

The Conservative Government in that province has shown its willingness to put ideology fundamentally ahead of not even just political sense, but economic sense. We have seen in that province that they had to be fought tooth and nail in terms of the Opposition, the New Democratic Party Opposition in that province. They fought tooth and nail against the Conservatives. They stopped them in their tracks in the Legislature because of their moves to privatize a number of key elements, the gas company, they wanted to privatize the potash corporations.

They, Mr. Speaker, have an unlimited agenda in terms of privatization. They have even brought in experts from the United Kingdom, Thatcherite experts on privatization, because that is their agenda most clearly enunciated in Canada. That is what a Tory majority Government is. What does a Tory minority Government do? Do they have a different philosophy? Do they have a different ideology, a different approach? Do they have a different agenda? The answer is clearly no. What they have is a different time frame. There are only so many things that they can do. What we have seen in Manitoba is that they are not moving in terms of privatizing Manitoba Hydro or Manitoba Telephones, Autopac, at this point in time.

* (1620)

As I continue my remarks over the next 20 minutes or so, 20-25 minutes, I will outline what that agenda

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is. The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that their agenda is the same. They have less ability because they are a minority Government, to be able to do it, not just in terms of support from the other Parties, as I will address in a minute, the Liberals are clearly on side with the Conservative on the issue of privatization. The bottom line is that they are unable and unwilling perhaps to move to the end of their agenda at this point in time. Let us recognize the fact that agenda exists.

So that is the Conservatives, privatization. That is a philosophy and ideology in an agenda and that is where this Bill fits in, Mr. Speaker. It is part of that agenda.

Let us talk, however, Mr. Speaker, about the Liberals on this Bill. Let us talk about their position. You know, it is ironic, nationally, to see the Liberals opposing privatization of, for example, Petro-Canada; it is ironic to see them opposing other elements, associated elements of the Conservative agenda, the right-wing agenda in terms of such areas as privatization because in many ways the Liberals have only been reluctant converts to public ownership in a number of key areas. If it, for example, had not been for the New Democratic Party in the 1972 and 1973 sittings of the House of Commons, when the Liberals were in a minority, if it had not been for the New Democratic Party there never would have been a Petro-Canada. They were converts, as they have been on so many issues, pensions, unemployment insurance, the list continues, but they were converts on public ownership as well.

They have only, under pressure from the New Democratic Party, moved to establish Petro-Canada. I raise this because should it come as any surprise that in this Legislature, the Liberals, on yet another issue that is of fundamental importance, chose a fundamental difference between the Parties, have they sided with the New Democratic Party in speaking out against this Bill and the privatization of Manitoba Data Services? Have they done that, Mr. Speaker? No, they have not.

What they have done is they have fallen in with the Conservatives, as they have done on final offer selection, as they have done with pay equity in the private sector, as they have done in terms of funding for private day care centres. The list continues, as they have done in terms of other legislation effecting working people such as plant closures.

I could continue on issue after issue after issue where the Liberals have joined with the Conservatives, not just on the routine Bills or the Bills where there are technical differences. They, Mr. Speaker, on issue after issue in this Legislature have spoken out for the same type of agenda as the Conservatives. You know, that surprises me to a certain extent—I must admit I am not totally surprised—it does surprise me to the extent that we are in a minority Government situation and I talked about agendas before. I would have thought it would have been the Liberals' agenda on Bills such as this and other Bills not to be seen quite so much as being in step with a Conservative agenda.

Even for reasons of political opportunism I, for the life of me, Mr. Speaker, cannot understand why the Liberals, who have historically stolen policies from the New Democratic Party, federally and provincially, why

in this particular case they are stealing Conservative policies. I cannot understand why the Liberals in this particular Legislature have an agenda that the only real difference I see between the Liberals and Conservatives on issue after issue after issue of significance, the only difference is one is in Government and the other one would like to be in Government so they could bring in the same agenda, Mr. Speaker. It is a question of who is in and who is out.

Mr. Speaker, I say that in all seriousness. I am looking to the Liberals on this Bill, to the Member for St. Boniface (Mr. Gaudry) who I respect as a fair and open-minded individual. I am looking to the Member for Ellice (Ms. Gray), the Member for Radisson (Mr. Patterson). I am looking to the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) and the Member for Osborne (Mr. Alcock). Are there not some Bills for whatever reason, for reasons of political expediency even?

I am not asking you to take a position based on any fundamental shift in your ideas. I am asking to the Liberals are there not some issues in which they cannot side with us? You know the interesting thing is the only time the Liberals have really taken a stand is what, on the budget? They voted against the budget that brought in tax breaks for working families. We said we would support that budget, and I respect them. They took their position. I believe it was wrong, but since that time on key Bills their approach has been one of, quite frankly, supporting the Conservative agenda.

I really do not see that there is much difference in terms of their agenda on this Bill and other Bills and the Conservatives. I said really I believe that Manitobans expect more than one Party that is in power and another Party that would follow the same agenda that is out of power and would like to replace them. Let us not ignore the fact, Mr. Speaker, there was a time historically in this province when that was the only choice available to Manitobans.

There were people after the 1988 election, columnists in the Free Press for example. There were people who looked forward to a return to the good old days when the only real alternation in terms of power, in terms of ideas in this province, was between the Liberals and the Conservatives. They looked forward to it, because they saw it essentially as being a return to the predictable days of the past when there would not really be that much change if a Liberal Government replaced the Conservatives.

Those people I have spoken to in particular remember the 1950s and '60s. The Liberal Government of the 1950s was probably more right wing than the Conservative Party at that time, Mr. Speaker, 1958-1959 election. It was a shift. At that time there was maybe some sense of the Liberals being more to the right and the Progressive Conservatives being more progressive. They attempted to live up to that label.

I point to the fact it is ironic that this Bill we are dealing with deals with one of Duff Roblin's legacies, Duff Roblin, the person that really established the Conservative Party in the post-war era. A good man says the Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Downey). I wish he would still be living up to his agenda, because

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at least in these sorts of areas he was progressive. You know there are people who looked forward to those days.

Quite frankly, knowing a number of the Liberal Members and having had the opportunity to get to know them over the last couple of years, I hope they are not trying to return to the 1950s. They do not see the route to power in this province is for them to be more right wing than the Conservatives. I cannot believe that the Member for St. Boniface (Mr. Gaudry) would want to be more right wing than the Conservatives or the Member for Radisson (Mr. Patterson) or the Member for Transcona (Mr. Kozak) or the Member for Ellice (Ms. Gray). I could continue, Mr. Speaker.

There may be some Members in that caucus who I believe wish to be more right wing than the Conservatives, but I cannot believe that of the other Members in which case I ask why, why on this Bill, why on other Bills, are they following the same agenda? In fact on some issues they are more right wing than the Conservatives. The Liberal Leader on health user fees has suggested we have user fees in our hospitals. I do not want to get into that issue. I am very pleased to get into it because I note that the Liberals have never denied that. They have never said that is not their policy. They have never disowned the comments by their Leader.- (interjection)- I agree with the Member for Transcona (Mr. Kozak) that the comments of the Leader of the Liberal Party are not worthy of comment in many cases, and I am glad he recognizes that.

They must be having some very interesting discussions in their caucus if the comments of the Leader of the Liberal Party are not worthy of comment. On other issues I believe they are not worthy of comment either, in terms of final offer selection or plant closure legislation.

I am asking the Liberals in this case, really through you, Mr. Speaker, why do they not take a stand? Why do they not take a stand on some issues and distinguish themselves from the Conservatives? It does not have to be this Bill. It could be on final offer selection. I throw that out to them. It could be on plant closure legislation. There are Bills that we are debating now that give them the opportunity.

As I said, I am not expecting a conversion. This is no road to Damascus here. I am asking the people not, change their ideas, change 100, more than 100 years of tradition, because the Liberal Party traditionally, I know, has not really had defined positions. Its positions have been constantly evolving over time.

* (1630)

I believe we recognize that, but you know I used to think that the Liberals had at least some idea of—they used to talk about being in the middle of the road, Mr. Speaker, in the middle of the road. I remember that, those sorts of comments, but where is this Liberal alternative? There is no Liberal alternative. I throw this out and yet I am met with silence. I am met with silence on Bill after Bill after Bill.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, really you have had a chance to observe this, and I ask other individuals who are

looking at this objectively, is there really a difference in the agenda on that third category of Bills that I talked about? If you will recall the Bills, Mr. Speaker, where there is a big difference in terms of philosophy, no, there is not a difference on Bill after Bill after Bill.

I am left with the conclusion and I am no—I have been in this House eight years. I am not the most senior Member of the House by any stretch of the imagination. There are other Members here who have been here much longer than I have.- (interjection)- The Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Downey) in particular. In 1988, and I know the Minister of Northern Affairs does remember when there were Liberals prior to 1981, I was elected to a House where there were no Liberals.

I used to think that if the Liberals were here they would at least try and find some middle ground that they keep talking about. In the two years they have been here they have found no middle ground. In the two years they have been here they have adopted the agenda of the Conservative Party, and I am beginning to wonder.- (interjection)- The Liberals laugh, Mr. Speaker, but we see where they are on final offer selection, we see where they are on plant closure legislation. We see, Mr. Speaker, on this Bill—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please; order, please. I would like to remind the Honourable Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) that the question before the House is Bill No. 98, The Manitoba Data Services Disposition and Consequential Amendments Act. I would ask the Honourable Member to keep his remarks relevant to that Bill.

Mr. Ashton: I apologize, Mr. Speaker, for being distracted by the Liberals and their attempt to try and deflect from my comments and the fact that on this Bill once again, and I am trying to take from the global context, take from the experience of this Session, take from the experience of the Sessions of which we have had a chance to observe the Liberal Party, the fact they really are not anything different than, first of all, what they had suggested in 1988.

If you were to listen to the Liberals you would think they had no history prior to 1988 because they did not have Members in this House. They have been around for more than 100 years and we New Democrats have had experience with Liberals for the length of time that we have existed since the 1930s as the CCF, since the 1960s as the New Democratic Party.

We have had experience on these type of Bills. You know quite frankly it is easier dealing with Conservatives on Bills such as these. You expect the Conservatives to be bringing in a Bill that would privatize MDS.

What do you expect from the Liberals? What do you expect, Mr. Speaker? If anyone expected an alternative, if anyone expected a middle ground on these and other issues, they are sadly disappointed. I really wonder how the Liberals can justify what they are doing on these types of Bills, how they can justify it to the people that voted for them in the last election. I know a lot of people that would have said they would have bought this sort of a slogan the Liberals had about competence

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with heart. I remember that slogan. We certainly saw the competence aspect of it demolished yesterday. I am going to take them to the Consumers Bureau if they go in the next campaign and talk about competence, when we saw yesterday—if this is the Party that thinks they are ready to govern, I do not even think they are even ready to be the official Opposition after yesterday.

It is also in the question of heart. Where is their heart on Bills such as this? They are supporting the Tories. They are supporting the Tories on Bill after Bill after Bill, Bills such as this, Mr. Speaker, showing they have no sense of what impact it is going to have, no real concern. This case for the workers at Manitoba Data Services, the many people who are affected by this Bill and the proposed privatization, the many Manitobans whose secrecy in terms of records, confidentiality, is going to be affected. So where is the competence? Where is the heart?

I apologize for having earlier, in my attempt to develop what I believe is clearly the situation here in terms of the political situation, the fact that the Liberals and Conservatives are standing for the same issues so many times. I must apologize if I strayed into other Bills and other issues, but I believe it is important at every opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to put it on the record. I say so reluctantly, because I do wish and I still have some hope that on some Bills, whether it be this Bill or whether it be other Bills before us, that there will be at least some evidence on the part of the Liberals that they are going to listen. Not to us, they do not have to listen to the New Democratic Party, but when they had Bills such as Bill 31 and members of the public making presentations, are they going to ignore those Manitobans?

Is the Member for Transcona (Mr. Kozak) going to ignore the plea that has been made so many times, the plea that the Liberals and the Conservatives listen? Are they going to ignore that? Are they going to ignore the concerns expressed on this particular Bill, Mr. Speaker? Are they going to do that. Sometimes I hear the Liberals try and suggest they have open minds on issues? I am waiting to see some evidence of that. I really say this reluctantly, because I would much rather be standing here or standing and discussing other Bills of the type that I have mentioned, whether it be Bill 31, Bill 17 or any other Bill. I would rather be able to do something positive for the people of Manitoba by seeing, for example, Bill 31 stopped or Bill 17 passed, or in this case, not seeing this type of privatization.

Even on just one Bill, Mr. Speaker, because this is a minority Government. We are here, I believe, to be as flexible as is possible, recognizing that there are issues of principle that divide us. Really, our Party has taken principle positions, but we are open to some sort of shift in this agenda, because I believe it is negative for the Province of Manitoba. I look at the current scenario in Manitoba. We have a minority Government. Depending on what happens after the next election, we could have another minority Government. I look at it, and I say to myself, we put our positions very clearly on the record. I believe the people of Manitoba know where we stand on privatization or matters affecting working people and job creation.

I really see, Mr. Speaker, that some major difficulties are going to develop in this province. We have one Party, as I said earlier, that is in power and has an agenda, one Party that is out of power and has the same agenda and goes to the people of Manitoba and says, we are the alternative. Changing the faces, changing the names does not change the agenda if those agendas are still the same.

It really does not matter, to my mind in looking at it, based on the evidence, not based on any preconceived ideas I have about either the Liberals or Conservatives. It makes no difference to my mind and the current Session of the Legislature whether there is Premier Gary Filmon or Premier Sharon Carstairs. It would not make a single bit of difference. What difference would it make? Would we see no privatization of MDS? No, we would see the same private privatization. Would we see no repeal of FOS? No, we would see the same repeal. Would we see plant closure legislation? No, we would see no plant closure. Would we see any changes in any of the other policies? No, it would be the same. It would be much the same.

It really, Mr. Speaker, puzzles me. What is the strategy of the Liberal Party on this Bill and other Bills? Are they going to the Manitoba electorate?

An Honourable Member: What is their policy, period?

Mr. Ashton: What is their policy, period? I would say to the Member for La Verendrye (Mr. Pankratz) that I believe their policies, if you look at it, when they do define them, are very similar to the policies you espouse. I ask the Member for La Verendrye in his constituency, if the Liberal Party goes and says, we could be better Conservatives than the Conservatives, and the Conservatives go and say, we are the Conservatives, what is their response going to be? I believe they will probably vote for the real Conservatives. Not that I would ever vote, but I ask it the other way.

We will be going to people in the next election; unless there are some traumatic changes on the part of the Liberal Party, we are going to be saying, do you want a Party that always stands for the working people of this province, that will always fight against the right wing agenda or privatization and deregulation, that being the New Democratic Party? Or do you want a Party that during elections talks, uses some of the rhetoric, even steals some of the policies of the New Democratic Party?

Mr. Speaker, I know that once again the answer is going to be that they want the real thing, not a rather poor imitation. I say that and I recognize in the Liberal Party there are some people that perhaps have some hope. I still believe there are Members of the Liberal Party that are with us on some of these issues. I believe that if they were allowed to stand up and speak from the heart, and speak truly for their constituents, they would stand up and they would say they do not support Bill 98 or Bill 31, that they do not support Bill 17, that they reject the right wing agenda that their Leader has mapped out, the right-wing agenda some of their key critics are mapping out in this Legislature.

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Mr. Speaker, the Liberals who were supposed to be different when they were elected in 1988 are not different whatsoever. They are the same Liberals. They are afraid to speak out. They are afraid to take a stand. I look to the Members and ask them whether they will, on any of the Bills where we have seen that philosophical, that ideological, that fundamental bottom line difference, whether any of them, whether even one of them will get on their feet and have the courage to vote against their Leader. Will they do that? I would suggest no.

Despite the fact that the Leader of the Liberal Party has at times suggested they will have free votes, does anyone, Mr. Speaker, after seeing them after the last two years, believe that they will stand and vote differently? The unfortunate conclusion is no. I say unfortunate because there are Bills where I have not given up hope. Even if there is only a 1 percent chance of success, Mr. Speaker. Even if there is not even one chance in a thousand of stopping what I feel are bad policy initiatives on the part of the Government. I am willing to fight even if there is one chance in a thousand on some of these Bills, that there is some other way, whether it be on Bill 31 or Bill 98. I am willing and our caucus is willing to go the extra mile, to recognize this is a minority Government situation, and try to stop what we feel are poor initiatives on the part of the Government.

As we stand here, Mr. Speaker, and we are well into the Session, it is not a record Session but we are in a position where we have sat for 133 days. Not the longest in history, it could be by the time we are finished. If it is, it should come as no surprise. It is a minority Government. There are three Parties, three officially recognized active Parties. I think one would expect that one has a lengthier Session.

If we do sit for a record length of time and if we do see any changes of heart, whether it be from the Conservatives or from the Liberals, I will have considered it time well spent. If they change their mind on Bill 31, or change their mind on Bill 98, or change their mind on Bill 70, those critical issues, if they change their mind on even one of those Bills, if there is even an infinitesimal shift in their position, a crack in that united alliance we see on some of these critical Bills, it will be worthwhile, Mr. Speaker. If we can just stop the right-wing agenda of one infinitesimal step I will consider the time we have spent in this Legislature worthwhile.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, even as we saw yesterday with the passage of a number of Bills through to committee where we can hear from the members of the public, we are continuing the fight on some critical Bills. That is why today we have put speakers up on this particular Bill, and indicated that we hope that there will be somebody that will listen. That is why we will do the same on other Bills as we go into third reading. We are not out of this Session yet by any stretch of the imagination. I am not saying that as a threat. I am not saying that as a prediction. I am just stating the obvious fact that we are still debating second readings.

I believe we are moving towards resolution of many of the matters before us because many of the Bills, as

I said earlier are in the first and the second categories if you recall, not controversial or Bills that need amendment in committee and those Bills we have moved through. We are now dealing with the last Bill essentially in terms of second reading, the last Bill outside of The Appropriation Act which is Bill 99, a financial Bill. I am still saying that we have time left for people to look at things objectively.

Let us perhaps just put aside for one minute, just put aside what I talked about in terms of history and philosophy and ideology, and look at this particular situation. We have a Crown corporation that is making money. The divestiture, Mr. Speaker, will give the private company a five-year monopoly. MDS has been lowering its rates consistently. There is no guarantee that will continue to be the case. It certainly will not continue to be the case at the same extent with a private company. We have expressed concerns about the privacy of records. I find it ironic that the Liberals, who spent a considerable amount of time in the first Session of the Legislature that we sat dealing with confidentiality of records, CSIS, their whole concerns about what was going to happen in terms of Manitoba records being turned over potentially to the federal Government. They are not raising that concern now. I ask people to keep an open mind on this. I realize in the case of the Conservatives it is their agenda. I will be the first one to state it.

I also realize in the case of the Liberals that probably it is their real agenda. They do not state it as clearly as the Conservatives do, but I believe it is part of their real agenda. Can we not put that agenda aside for one moment? Put aside the history, the philosophy, and the ideology, and just look at this in terms of common sense.

Mr. Speaker, the other Bills as they go to committee, where we are going to hear from members of the public, what we are hearing right now. I have heard some dramatic presentations in committee just this morning on Bill 31. On those types of Bills can we not have some open-mindedness, some attempt to come together for what is in the best interest of the province? I believe there is still room; I believe there is even some room for the Conservatives. They have in other provinces—they did in Ontario in a minority Government situation listen to the New Democratic Party on plant closure legislation—brought in some very significant changes that had been initiated by the New Democratic Party. I use that as an example that even for the Conservatives in a minority Government situation there is some room to maneuver, some room for them to adopt a flexible position.

An Honourable Member: You are being kind.

Mr. Ashton: I am being kind, I realize, and the Member for Churchill (Mr. Cowan) may have missed my point that it may be a one in a thousand chance, a one in one thousand chance.

An Honourable Member: I heard that, and I think that is being kind.

Mr. Ashton: The Member for Churchill doubts very much whether the Conservatives will do it. So long as

we have free and open debate in this Legislature I will be putting forward that suggestion, that proposal to the Conservative Party.

I turn myself, Mr. Speaker, to the Liberals. I turn myself to the Liberals; I ask them this question: Can they not in their heart find somewhere, somewhere to find some flexibility? I realize that probably—and the Member for Churchill (Mr. Cowan) may have his own views on this—there is not much better chance than the Conservatives.

An Honourable Member: Now I think you are being unkind.

Mr. Ashton: He thinks I am unkind. He thinks perhaps there is more hope for the Liberals. Perhaps there is because as I said earlier there may be some in their individuality who would like to stand in their place and vote against the position, the right-wing position of their Leader and many of their critics.

An Honourable Member: That is not the reason.

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Churchill (Mr. Cowan) says that is not the reason.

An Honourable Member: The reason is they do not have a philosophical base.

Mr. Ashton: He say they do not have a philosophical base. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, they can have it both ways. They can do whatever they want, suggests the Member for Churchill (Mr. Cowan), but that gives them more reason, more opportunity. No one is going to be surprised if the Liberals stand in their place on Bill 31, on Bill 98, on Bill 17, and say, we have changed our mind. We know they do not start from a fixed position to the same extent that, say, we do or the Conservatives do.

An Honourable Member: That is why there is more hope.

Mr. Ashton: The Member for Churchill (Mr. Cowan) says there is more hope. Well, I turn to the Liberals and say, will they show any signs of listening, of open-mindedness, of fairness, of even, Mr. Speaker, the middle of the road? Let us take the Bills we have, if they just want to do it randomly, take the number of Bills in which we have stood alone against the Conservatives where they have supported the Conservatives. Will they not support half the Bills, change their mind on half the Bills? They can toss a coin; it does not have to be a principal decision. They can say, we took the middle of the road, we voted with the NDP on final offer selection, voted against them on Manitoba Data Services.

We are at the point where I really do not care how they come to the decision. So long as the decision shows some element of listening, some element of coming together on important issues, some hope, Mr. Speaker, for that Party that says it is different, says it is new, and is neither, as it proves on a daily basis.

As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, over the next period of time, I think people are going to be increasingly

asking themselves, really what is the difference philosophically between the two old line Parties, as we often refer to them in the New Democratic Party?

An Honourable Member: One is awake.

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Churchill (Mr. Cowan) is unkind. He says, one is awake. I assume that the other is asleep. That may have been true last night, but I do believe it is not true on a normal basis.

Mr. Speaker, for the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) who likes to make many comments from his seat, I am looking to the Member for Inkster, I want to see whether he will stand in his place, whether he will vote against his caucus, whether he will speak up for his constituents on Bill 98 or Bill 31 or Bill 17. I can say that I say that now. I promise one thing to the Conservatives and to the Liberals. If they do not do that, if they both stand for the same agenda, our message to the people of Manitoba increasingly will be, not just in this Legislature but on the doorsteps, we will say to them that we are the only ones speaking out against the right-wing agenda or privatization, rollbacks of labour legislation. We are the only ones on issue after issue that are speaking up for the people of Manitoba.

Let the Conservatives and Liberals jockey for power and position. I will predict now that unless the Liberals see the error of their ways, the error of supporting the Conservative ideology and agenda, people are going to really ask themselves some questions. You want the real Conservatives, vote for the Conservatives. If you want the real New Democrats, vote for the real New Democrats. Do not deal with a Liberal Party that is a carbon copy on issue after issue of the Conservative Party. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Reg Alcock (Osborne): Mr. Speaker, if I may just respond to the Member for Thompson's (Mr. Ashton) comments. He is quite right, some people will choose to vote for the Conservatives, and some will choose to vote for the New Democrats, but the majority will vote for the Liberals. That is the problem they have right now.

Mr. Speaker, if I may take a minute in this debate to talk about Manitoba Data Services. I know it is not traditional, as this day has progressed, and certainly there is not much in the previous speech that would help me offer any kind of reflection on the other Parties' position on this. I would like to make a series of very simple remarks that reflect both the position of my Party and also my personal position, because I believe very strongly in this.

* (1650)

Let me start by saying that we are not ideologically for privatization, and we are not ideologically opposed to privatization. We believe in making each decision based on its merits. I believe, based on more than a little experience with this particular service and with this particular policy question, that the sale of Manitoba Data Services is in the best interests of the staff that work there. It is in the best interests of the Government

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of Manitoba, and it is in the best interest of the people of Manitoba. I firmly believe that after looking at this issue not just here in Manitoba but throughout North America.

What we are experiencing here in Manitoba is not unique. Governments back in the late '60s, early '70s, depending on the region of the province and how quick they were to adopt automation, because of the very high investment costs in putting together large assemblies of hardware and because of the needs to have staff to take care of them and programming staff to operate them because of the complexity, often throughout this country, throughout this continent, worked to build large data processing centres because they could not find any other way of accessing that kind of technology. The costs were simply too great.

Over time, and we saw it here in Manitoba, as they had to justify the operation of such a facility, they began to direct departments to use the facility. They began to force development through the services of a Manitoba Data Services. When I was in Government here, when I was in the Civil Service and we worked on the automation of a project here, what we found right off was that we had to go by first choice to Manitoba Data Services to receive the kind of programming assistance and ultimately the hardware selection that we would use to provide a service alternative to the agencies that we were providing services to.

We were not allowed to look at the range of hardware possibilities that were available. We were not allowed to look at the range of software that was available. We were not allowed to take advantage of any of the efficiencies that had been created in this field over the last two decades. We were forced because of central Government policy to justify the existence of this facility to use it and to use mainframe storage for a computer problem that did not require it.

Now we wrote the first proposal call on this particular service that we described the need for in 1983. It is 1989, Mr. Speaker, and they still do not have a system in place. They do not have a system in place because Government—and I think this is something that we are going to see increasingly into the '90s—has become simply too blunt an instrument to deal with the rate of change that is taking place in management and in the community at large.

If you look simply at the development of technology and this is a centre that provides support to the development of new technologies or the use of technology. Mr. Speaker, if I could I would like to close this today so if you can just give me sort of a 30 second warning in time to pass this Bill unless there is another speaker, I would just like to do that. I recognize the shortness of time.

The problem is—

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Honourable Minister of Northern and Native Affairs.

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Northern and Native Affairs): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder

if the Member would like to give leave and we could do away with Private Members' hour just to carry on with House Business and let him conclude his remarks. If the House would give leave to do away with Private Members' hour that would be good.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to waive Private Members' hour? Order, please; order, please. Is there leave to waive Private Members' hour? Agreed. Leave.

Mr. Alcock: Okay. Let me just -(interjection)- Thank you very much. The Honourable Member for Arthur (Mr. Downey) has been a great support over the last few minutes in this House.

Mr. Speaker, right now when you look at the development of new technologies it takes about 24 months, 24 or 28 months for a firm that builds new hardware to bring a product onto the market, and by the end of the 24 to 28 months that product has become obsolete and they have to have their second generation up and operating if they are to continue to be competitive in the market.

It takes Government, Mr. Speaker, some four to five years to make a decision on the acquisition of new hardware. Now the problem with that is that by the time they have decided what they are going to do, the hardware solution for the problem they are trying to solve is now out of date. They need to go back and put in new requests for yet new and updated forms of hardware in order to meet the need they started out to meet.

That is precisely what we saw in child welfare. That is precisely the kind of constraints that were put on the system as we attempted to build a system for identifying abused children, as we attempted originally to build a very simple, very elegant system for the tracking of children in care. We wanted to know things on a daily basis, very simple things like how many children we had in care, where they were placed, how they were being served. We could not get that information, because the systems we had in place were not adequate.

We believed, having seen examples in other parts of the country, that we could build a very low cost, very elegant solution to that problem using microcomputers that would be based in the agencies. In fact the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg worked hard on the model that proved quite workable, but rather than invest the \$30,000 in that solution the previous Government was prepared to invest several million dollars. Now the budgeting in my time in that position was nearly a quarter million dollars per agency—that is times eight—nearly \$2 million just for the hardware solutions to that problem. Today that figure has gone up considerably, as they are still working at trying to get that same hardware into those agencies, and they are still being unsuccessful. The reason they are being unsuccessful is that both the system and the technology are passing them by.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that if we follow the course that so many other jurisdictions have done and allow

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this service to be owned by a larger corporation that is in the business of programming and offering data processing services to private industry and to Governments, they will be freed of some of the constraints that public policy places on them. They will be able to acquire new equipment as it is feasible. They will be able to follow new trends in programming; they will be able to be innovative and creative in the solutions they provide to the problems that they encounter. I do not believe that was the situation under the previous Government, and I do not believe, frankly, it is the situation under any Government.

We are not simply in favour of privatizing, Mr. Speaker. We have some conditions, and these are conditions we have discussed with the Government. The first one of the conditions is that the staff that currently work for MDS be provided for, that they be offered equivalent or better positions with career paths and alternatives to their existing employment. The second condition is that there be some guarantees of confidentiality, that the information that is being held at that centre be maintained in such a way that the concerns of all Manitobans about the confidentiality of that information be maintained. I believe, from the information that we have received, that the Government has gone a long way to providing greater confidentiality than exists presently, that they are able to provide, both through the contracting and through the technology, a greater degree of comfort than we have today, as I stand here.

The third thing is that the province benefit. If we are going to sell the facility, we want to make sure that it remains here in Manitoba, that it provides a nucleus for the development of other technologies, something the Governments have always promised but never been able to deliver on, and never been able to deliver on because the policy questions are too laden with other issues. A company that specializes in this particular kind of business is free to make the decisions that are in the best interest of the employees and the best interest of the people and the best interest of the services the agency provides.

* (1700)

I think all of us will benefit. I think the employees will benefit because they will get better career paths. They will get more opportunities; they will get better training; they will find their lives enriched by this decision. The people of Manitoba will benefit because the records that are currently being held there will be held with greater care in better condition, under more stringent rules and guidelines than currently exist. The economy of Manitoba will benefit, because we will see a number of spin-offs to this sale as other technologies are imported and as other linkages are made with other corporations to make use of this data processing centre.

So it is not simply an ideological decision, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it is not an ideological decision, because there are some that we are not in favour of privatizing. There are some things where we think that the service is of a nature that should be held by Government. We are neither for nor against, but in this case after careful consideration and after a great deal of introspection and investigation both of the proposal

the Government is making and of the situation at MDS and throughout North America, we have decided to support the Government in the sale of this organization. I can say that I believe in that personally, I support that in every sense of the word.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think I will yield the floor, and we will see if anybody else wishes to speak; otherwise, we are prepared to pass this.

QUESTION put, MOTION carried.

An Honourable Member: Nay, on division.

Mr. Speaker: On division. Let the record show, on division.

COMMITTEE CHANGES

Mr. Steve Ashton (Second Opposition House Leader): Yes, I have some committee substitutions.

Mr. Speaker: Committee changes?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I have a change to the Industrial Relations Committee. I move, seconded by the Member for Rupertsland (Mr. Harper), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Industrial Relations be amended as follows: the Member for Rupertsland (Mr. Harper) for the Member for The Pas (Mr. Harapiak), the Member for St. Johns (Ms. Wasylycia-Leis) for the Member for Concordia (Mr. Doer).

I also move, Mr. Speaker, seconded by the Member for Rupertsland (Mr. Harper), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Public Utilities be amended as follows: the Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Storie) for the Member for The Pas (Mr. Harapiak).

Mr. Speaker: The Honourable Member for Inkster, committee changes?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Yes, committee changes, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the Member for Transcona (Mr. Kozak), that the composition of the Public Utilities and Natural Resources be amended as follows: Burrows (Mr. Chornopyski) for Niakwa (Mr. Herold Driedger), Fort Garry (Mr. Laurie Evans) for Wolseley (Mr. Taylor).

I also move, seconded by the Member for Transcona (Mr. Kozak), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Industrial Relations be amended as follows: for this evening at 8 p.m., St. Boniface (Mr. Gaudry) for Niakwa (Mr. Herold Driedger), Ellice (Ms. Gray) for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux).

On February 28 at 8 p.m., St. James (Mr. Edwards) for St. Boniface (Mr. Gaudry), St. Vital (Mr. Rose) for Ellice (Ms. Gray).

On March 1 at 10 a.m., Ellice (Ms. Gray) for St. Vital (Mr. Rose); March 1 at 8 p.m., Transcona (Mr. Kozak) for Radisson (Mr. Patterson).

March 2 at 2 p.m., Niakwa (Mr. Herold Driedger) for Transcona (Mr. Kozak).

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Mr. Speaker: Agreed? Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh!

An Honourable Member: Six o'clock.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call it six o'clock? The hour being 6 p.m.—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hour being 6 p.m., this House now adjourns and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Wednesday).