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**OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)**

**Monday, May 9, 2016**

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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**Public Service Labour Relations Act**

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures as reported (with amendments) from the committee and of Motions Nos. 1, 2, and 3.

**Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak to a very important issue that affects RCMP members across the country. I come from a city that is home to the largest RCMP detachment in Canada. I speak not only as a member of Parliament but also a former councillor and former mayor. Over those 18 years, I have seen many changes in the organization, and I have worked with many people who care very deeply about the RCMP members and the force.

For purposes of context, within British Columbia, all communities and cities, except for about seven, are policed by the RCMP. There is a provincial RCMP force in eight provinces. All large cities pay 90% of the cost for policing, and communities under 5,000 are supported. The 10% that the federal government pays is for the ability to pull 10% of the force at any given time to deal with federal issues or events.

As I mentioned, this is because many cities have grappled with numerous issues over the years, whether it was resources or lack thereof, equipment for officers, how to deal with the changing face of crime, how to better support members, or the cost of downloading. Some of these issues will continue to be a challenge while other issues are ever evolving. Cities have also had their challenges with ever-changing legislation, with results that only come to light when we see it played out on the front lines.

I want to note that it was the Supreme Court, not this government, that is responsible for this. The Supreme Court ruling held that the exclusion of members of the RCMP from collective bargaining and the imposition by management of a non-union labour relations regime was unconstitutional. Further, the current RCMP labour relations regime denied RCMP members

choice and did not permit them to identify and advance their workplace concerns free from the influence of management.

I support the right of RCMP members to be represented, if they so choose, and to have a collective agreement in place. It can provide clarity and certainty, not only for members but management, and especially for the cities and communities they serve.

I took the opportunity to discuss this bill with many RCMP members across the country and in my own city, and I heard a number of concerns. While some of those concerns have been addressed and we were able to get the government to make amendments to the bill in committee, there are still concerns that remain.

I support the amendments to strike clauses 40 and 42, and I thank my Conservative colleagues for the work they did in committee to make that a reality. However, I feel there are still fundamental flaws with Bill C-7 and that the government is not listening to RCMP members.

As I stated earlier, there are issues that the organization continues to grapple with. Some programs have been put in place. However, certain issues continue to surface. I feel very strongly that we have an opportunity at this point to work together to finally address them and bring about the change that is sorely needed.

One of the fundamental tenets of any policing organization is safety, not only for the members themselves, but also their fellow officers and the general public. RCMP members should be involved in a meaningful way and have mechanisms in place to discuss any and all safety concerns, without the real or perceived threat of discipline. They should also have the ability to address working conditions within a respectful and supportive process.

In my opinion, this should not be part of the bargaining restrictions. It saddens me deeply, as it does every member in the entire force, that since 2006, 30 RCMP members have taken their lives. The most recent was here in Ottawa, on March 17 of this year.

Post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, mental and emotional trauma, are very real conditions within the workplace environment. What police officers witness and experience on a daily basis goes far and beyond what any one of us may experience in our entire lifetime.

I have always been an advocate for mandatory support measures to be in place for RCMP members. As we discuss Bill C-7, I feel we can strengthen and broaden the mandate to begin to address some of these issues.

One RCMP officer wrote me and said, "Essentially, this bill tells members of the RCMP that although they are trusted to put their lives on the line every day for Canada, Canada does not trust them to ask for appropriate changes to their working conditions, equipment, or harassment concerns".

Each and every police officer should be supported and protected as they fulfill their duties. I have immense respect for the work they do on our behalf in our communities, and for our families. We should do the same for them. Therefore, I will not be supporting the bill in its current form.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):**

Mr. Speaker, I find it unfortunate that the member has determined that the bill is not worthy of support. One can appreciate that there is always room for improvement, but at the same time recognizing that the bill would move us forward on an important file.

Does the member see any benefit within the bill itself? Is there any aspect of the legislation that she or the Conservative Party supports?

**Ms. Dianne L. Watts:**

Mr. Speaker, as I stated earlier, I have worked closely with members of the RCMP for over 18 years. A number of issues have been systemic, which as the former mayor working with the federal government and provincial governments, we have tried to overcome and work with.

The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that RCMP members have a right to a labour organization and to be represented. I support that 100%. The bill supports that element of the Supreme Court decision, and we would go forward with that.

There are significant elements that are not within Bill C-7, and because they are so fundamental and so underlying, I cannot support the bill.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, as many in the House know, I have had a long relationship with both the RCMP and the union movement in Canada. Both have touched my family significantly and personally, so I am in a unique position to comment on Bill C-7.

The one area in Bill C-7 that I have great difficulty with is the provision that would not allow members to vote in a secret ballot environment on whether to certify or decertify at any time in the future. I would ask my colleague to expand upon this if possible. The secret ballot is a fundamental tenet of democracy in this country. All of us who sit in this place were elected by secret ballot. The Speaker of this assembly was elected by a secret ballot. It is the norm across Canada. Most provincial legislation ensures that secret ballots take place in union certification drives.

Does my friend and colleague believe that the bill should contain a provision to allow secret balloting? Could she comment on why the government seems so steadfast against allowing our RCMP members to vote in a secret ballot environment, as every other Canadian would have the right to do?

**Ms. Dianne L. Watts:**

Mr. Speaker, it is a fundamental right for every person who belongs to any labour organization to have the right to a free ballot. I cannot answer the question about why the government does not want that measure in place, on any front, because fundamentally it is our right as individuals to have the ability to do that.

As my colleague clearly stated, those who are elected in a general election are elected by secret ballot. It is all done by secret ballot because that protects the right of the individual. I absolutely agree with the member that it should be within the legislation, and it is not.