

Worries over anti-terrorism bill arrive in Newmarket-Aurora



By Brock Weir

The nation-wide debate over the Federal Government's proposed Bill C-51 spilled into Newmarket-Aurora on Saturday morning as over 80 protestors descended on the office of local MP Lois Brown to rally against the measures.

The Bill, which was introduced earlier this year, and has since cleared two critical hurdles in Parliament, will pave the way for information sharing among government agencies on issues that ?undermine? national security, broadens the criminal code definition of terrorism, increases the mandate of CSIS, and enables restrictions on people who might pose a threat to air travel.

While the Bill came in with the support of the Conservative government, as well as the support of Liberal leader Justin Trudeau, it has been subject to significant criticism from the NDP opposition and has been divisive among the electorate.

Those opposing were out in force in protests across the country last weekend.

?This is a one day rally,? said one woman in the crowd. ?It is wonderful we are showing ourselves and standing up today, but it doesn't stop here. The legislation is percolating and it can tip the balance now. Let [politicians] know serious voters are against this bill, not people who are afraid to look like they are aligned with terrorists. We're obviously not. Let them know the face of the people who object to this bill are the people who built this country, people who are currently running this country with their hard work, and the people who want to leave a better country for their children.

?They might try to tell you you're being pushy for terrorists. That's garbage and you know it. B2ehind Bill C-51 is a calculated application of fear to ignorance distilled into hatred. How do we combat this? Community and information. It is slow, it is hard, but it works.?

Several Aurora residents were on hand at the protest, held outside Ms. Brown's constituency office on Bayview Avenue at Mulock Drive, including long-time trail and environmental activist Klaus Wehrenberg.

?I think this is fear mongering all the way,? he said. ?I am also worried about them using the bill to basically swot all legitimate protests, including about the environment, which I am very interested in, as well as native people especially. They have to have the protests as a matter of propagating their cause.?

While he admitted he still feels he has more to learn about the legislation itself, he said, as an advocate, he would prefer different measures on the table.

?The terrorism thing is blown so out of proportion, it is unbelievable,? he added. ?We need a different bill on the table to show what can be put in its place. Changing it a little bit here and there is probably not going to help. We need to have a forum like there is here.?

This was a view shared by fellow resident John Cooper, who attended not just the first leg of the rally at Ms. Brown's office, but continued on to a larger demonstration outside the Newmarket Court House.

?I wanted to make a statement in opposition to Bill C-51 and in support of human rights and the rights of free speech and assembly,? said Mr. Cooper. My main objections] are the tendency towards creating a secret police, unaccountable to public and parliament, and carrying on some of the nefarious goings-on that we have seen.?

A solution would be to either scrap the legislation entirely or completely revise it, including ?proper surveillance and supervision under Parliament and accountable to the public in an open and transparent way.?

?I hope this creates a public awareness and visibility of the issue which, I think for most people, is at the risk of sliding by without due diligence and proper planning and attention from the public,? he concluded.

For Ms. Brown's views on Bill C-51 and opposition to it, please see her column, Ottawa Report, on Page 5.