

Government Orders

The worst part of it all is that the provinces will have to continue to meet the standards defined by Ottawa. Those that fail to do so will be immediately deprived of what remains of federal funding, that is an increasingly paltry amount.

Furthermore, this so-called decentralization program will certainly not eliminate duplication, there will always be two ministers of health, two ministers of natural resources, of the environment, of revenue, etc. The alleged project to give more power to the provinces is hollow, because the federal government is not withdrawing from areas that come under provincial jurisdiction in exchange for a share of the taxes we pay to Ottawa. Is federalism cost effective?

For Quebec in 1996-97, these forecasts represent a reduction of almost \$700 million or 27.1 per cent of the cuts made to all the provinces. The federal government's way of proceeding in this regard will obviously have a definite impact on public finances in Quebec. Deprived of part of its revenues, which I might add were earmarked for welfare, health and post-secondary education, the Quebec government will be left no alternative other than to make drastic cuts in its own spending, not to reduce its own deficit, but simply to make up for the shortfall due to the drop in federal transfers. Quebec will obviously not be spared in the round of cuts planned for 1997-98. In looking at the Martin budget, the more one reads the more one realizes that it is more of a curse than a blessing to the people of Quebec.

The same can be said for the federal public service and more specifically for the Outaouais which feels it has been given an especially rough ride by the federal budget. The government has shown itself to be extremely insensitive in announcing the elimination of 45,000 jobs in the Canadian public service over three years. Of these 45,000 jobs to be cut during the next three years, some 14,000 will be in the Hull-Ottawa area, nearly one third of jobs cut in the whole country. It is easy to see that this decision would have a direct and very negative impact on the economy and social life in the area.

Of the cutbacks expected to total \$29 billion over the next three years, the federal government intends to cut nearly \$16.9 billion from the management and operations of its programs. So the federal deficit will to a large extent be reduced on the backs of federal public servants, especially those in the Outaouais region.

Even more unacceptable is the fact that the federal government knowingly made the Outaouais region economically dependent on it. Seeking to generate in Quebec and especially in the Outaouais a sense of belonging to Canada, the federal government began by creating the National Capital Commission in 1958. Pierre Trudeau's Liberal government, eager to give concrete proof of French Power as a means of hampering the sovereignist movement in Quebec, proceeded to implant a large

number of federal government buildings on the Quebec shore of the Ottawa River in the 1970s. Probably taking the region for granted, the federal government seems to have no qualms about leaving the region to fend for itself in the wake of the disastrous cuts it announced. To repeat the jest made by the Quebec finance minister, which I feel hit the mark, the federal government is acting like a guy who gets a girl pregnant and then takes off.

• (1010)

I agree with the Coalition des associations économiques de l'Outaouais, which is of the opinion that the federal government must assume responsibility for the region. It must help to absorb the shock of budgetary decisions on the Outaouais region, just like it does when there is a shortage of fish in the Atlantic or a drought in the Western prairies, by giving the region a one-time payment to be put in a fund for diversifying the region's economy. Unless I am mistaken, the budget makes no mention of such a compensation which, by rights, should be paid to the region. Does the government intend—and I see that the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, who is responsible for looking after the region, is sneaking out—does the government intend to give—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Order. As we all know, the rules of the House stipulate that no comment can be made either about the presence, and most especially about the absence, of members of the House, in view of all of the various demands and responsibilities of our positions.

Mr. Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, I apologize. Unless I am mistaken, the budget makes no mention of this compensation which, by rights, should be paid to the region. Does the government intend to make good on the request made by the Coalition des associations économiques de l'Outaouais? We are still waiting for an answer, and from what I can gather, we will not get one today either. Obviously, these massive public service staffing cuts are underhanded and pernicious, because they were made unilaterally in an authoritarian way.

In the months leading up to the budget, the government obstinately refused to reach an agreement with the Public Service Alliance of Canada, which represents 70 per cent of federal public servants. This union, however, was ready to negotiate and to hammer out what could have been a mutual and fair agreement with the government. No matter, the government rejected the union's proposal out of hand, not even bothering to negotiate.

The people are justifiably concerned about the quality of the services they are entitled to, which will now be provided by a heavily mortgaged public service. Would it not have been better for the government, instead of slashing its own public service as it did, to put in place mechanisms allowing it to stop wasting Quebec and Canadian taxpayers' money?