

Government Orders

Someone will have to do some planning in Quebec. We do not know what awaits us? Why is that? It is because this government lacks the courage to get down to work, to assume its responsibilities and exert tighter control over Canadian public finances, but it is also because it is incredibly hypocritical. This government knows that Quebec is about to launch a referendum campaign and that Quebecers will have to make a crucial decision this year.

Consequently, it does not want to show its true colours. It does not want to show that the federal system is obsolete and going bankrupt. It does not want to show that the federal budget will hurt Quebecers, who will have to pay more and more taxes for fewer and fewer services, and who will witness a crisis in their provincial public finances, thanks to Ottawa. The federal government is hiding all that.

I can tell you that the allocation of federal money based on the population criterion is being formally discussed among top government officials. These senior public servants are saying: do not mention the fact that we told you. Do not mention the fact that this government is hypocritical, that it is waiting for Quebecers to decide on their political and constitutional future before giving them a shock treatment and making them pay and get bad news year after year, since this federal system can no longer survive and can only cause serious damage to Canadian public finances. Where is this said? Nowhere. Why? Because it would be tantamount to telling Quebecers: "Look, this is hurting you and it will continue to hurt you year after year".

• (1050)

This system is taking us nowhere, with the morose political and social climate it will be creating for the next few years, because cosmetic and hypocritical changes like those regarding transfer payments to the provinces will not fix the basic problem of the system. The problem is that it is a big machine, totally outdated and completely dysfunctional, no longer capable of meeting the needs of the 1990s and of the next century. The government will certainly not tell us that before the referendum.

Regarding transfers to the provinces, Bill C-76 also contains a provision that I consider cynical and arrogant, particularly as far as Quebec is concerned. Clause 13, Part V, provides for the maintenance of national health standards and the introduction of new national standards in the areas of social assistance and post-secondary education. Provinces who do not comply will lose their entitlement.

Imagine that, they will be cut off. As if what we get back from the federal government in the form of transfer payments was all Ottawa's to begin with. As if these public funds were a gift from this munificent federal benefactor to the provinces. The fact is that this is taxpayers' money being redistributed to taxpayers in Quebec as elsewhere.

In Quebec, we pay the federal government \$30 billion in taxes each year, \$30 billion. And they are threatening us? They say that new national standards on social assistance and post-secondary education will be introduced and that provinces who do not comply with these standards—which may be sheer nonsense in relation to the socioeconomic and cultural reality in Quebec—will see their transfers cut off.

Madam Speaker, can you imagine what that could mean to have, in Quebec, education standards imposed by the anglophone majority in Canada? Do you have any idea? Can you imagine how this sounds to Quebecers, with all the historical references we have?

Can you imagine Clyde Wells, in Newfoundland, with his friends and accomplices elected to the federal Parliament, determining indirectly, through Canada-wide standards, the content and goals of the education system in Quebec? Can you believe that we will be entitled to only 25 per cent of the power of decision over post-secondary education matters? Is that what the people of Quebec want? I do not think so.

They should know, however, that this is what this government stands for. We know what the introduction of Canada-wide education standards means. It means that Ontario, Newfoundland, the anglophone majority in Canada will have a say in how our education system, this system through which our identity and culture as Quebecers is perpetuated and passed on from one generation to the next, should operate. That is what is proposed, what this says.

We are told not to worry because, before Canada-wide standards can be implemented, negotiations will be held with the provinces and a consensus will have to be reached. This is not a guarantee that there will be no Canada-wide standards. Given this government's record, a government that forced the repatriation of the constitution upon us, in spite of the numerous objections raised by Quebec, and the Quebec National Assembly in particular, we can easily imagine that these Canada-wide education and social assistance standards will be implemented.

This measure may not have a financial impact, but I can assure you that its political impact and the impact it will have on Quebec's culture and cultural future are undeniable. That is what is unacceptable to the official opposition, the Bloc Québécois.

• (1055)

It should come as no surprise that this bill contains a provision that thumbs its nose at historic facts and ignores the need for Quebecers to control 100 per cent of their future, their culture and what they are. It should come as no surprise that this political bludgeon should materialize in a bill on public finances.

I am certainly not surprised, and this week I had the same reaction when a motion was tabled in the House on Quebec's representation in the House of Commons, asking for guarantees—as was the case in the draft constitutional agreements that followed the demise of Meech Lake—that Quebec would have