

Government Orders

The transfer presently to the provinces with regard to health care is in the form of both tax points and cash. The member will well know from the current example with regard to the clinics in Alberta that the Minister of Health has indicated that in the event that the Alberta government does not respect and uphold those principles of the Canada Health Act there will be a withholding of the cash amounts relative to the extra billing in Alberta.

Under the Canada health and social transfer, the government has combined the transfer mechanisms primarily because of the cash component. In the event that there was no cash component with individual programs, the government would have absolutely no leverage whatsoever to help to protect those standards and those principles of the Canada Health Act and of the other programs.

The member will well know that the provinces do not necessarily spend the moneys transferred to them. Whether it be post-secondary education, health, or social programs, they do not necessarily direct those funds received for the purpose for which they were given. In fact the provinces have the latitude.

Since the provinces are already spending the money in a form they believe is appropriate for their province, how would combining the transfers for all the programs under one impact, if at all, the present operations of the provincial governments?

[Translation]

Mr. Rocheleau: Mr. Speaker, what struck me in my colleague's question is that, in the spirit of the Constitution, a jurisdiction like health falls strictly under the purview of the provinces. It is unconstitutional for the federal government to intervene in the way it does, exchanging assistance for adherence to standards. From an historical perspective, this is an abuse of its power to spend. And historically, it has also always granted itself the corresponding powers to tax, and this has been going on since the end of the second world war.

This allows it to intervene today, some might argue in a responsible way, but I must say that we in Quebec have no need for this. We are stuck with the federal government, stuck with paying it \$30 billion each year and stuck with its standards in areas for which Quebecers already have institutions. We have no pretensions, but we also have nothing to learn from it regarding social democracy and sound social organization principles.

This order of things may well suit the rest of Canada. We see that the Canadian government holds a larger place in the hearts of Canadians than Quebecers: our first allegiance is to the government of Quebec. Therefore, the internal logic of Canada may make a central government in Ottawa work well. That will be your decision to make in the post-referendum context. But, now, the logic of Canada contrasts with the logic of Quebec, and we ask Canada to withdraw from this kind of thing and to let the

government of Quebec keep its tax points in order to administer health, all social issues and education.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in this House to speak on a bill that, according to the government opposite, gives the provinces more decision making room, while taking \$7 billion away from them, in the space of two years.

With absolute seriousness, the Liberals are proclaiming for all to hear that this is new flexible federalism. The provinces are not being given the right to withdraw; the federal government is clearly opting out financially with the aim of reducing its debt and balancing its budget, if possible. In reality, the federal government is cutting off the provinces and giving itself more right to supervise and to intervene.

• (1555)

During the course of this debate you have heard words like demagoguery and bilge. I am going to quote documents of the present government, not documents of the Conservatives and not documents of the wicked separatists, but documents of the Liberals, who lacked the courage to note in their red book that they would drop the most disadvantaged after cutting them off.

They also failed to note that they would make students in Quebec and Canada meet national standards after they cut off their financial support. I am going to quote documents from members and documents from ministers, who are present today in this House. The \$7 billion cuts are contained in the latest budget. It provides for \$2.5 billion in 1996-97 and \$4.5 billion in 1997-98; 2.5 and 4.5 add up in my books to \$7 billion in cuts, as set out in the budget.

As regards the national standards, which cause the Minister of Finance to say, and I quote: "[I] will be inviting all provincial governments to work together on developing, through mutual consent, a set of shared principles and objectives that could underlie the new Canada Social Transfer". This is a quote from the minister, the member for LaSalle—Émard.

What happens if there is no agreement, no mutual consent? It seems to me that, in 1981, there was agreement and mutual consent in the case of nine provinces out of ten. Since that agreement, Quebec has suffered the shame and affront of unilateral patriation. Our motto is: "Je me souviens", and we remember.

We must also bear in mind that the current Prime Minister was a major player in this coup against Quebec, and that he is now promising to be reasonable, as he told this House. But if the future is anything like the past, in Quebec, we are in for more unilateral encroachments.

They talk about agreement, respect and mutual consent, while at the same time federal officials are producing documents that I would describe politely as somewhat centralizing. The report of the national education standards committee, a 130 page report submitted to the Prime Minister recommends among other things—this is recommendation No. 1—that standards of excel-