

*Government Orders*

We should be looking at this very carefully for precisely that reason, because this government has been all too prone to giving away the store to provincial governments with the result that we are losing as a federal government and as a federal Parliament the ability to make laws for the benefit of all Canadians.

One of the items that occurred and which is of particular concern to me was a topic of debate through the activities of the joint committee on the Constitution.

It had to do with regional development. Regional development is one aspect and one reason the federal equalization payments exist. The federal equalization payments exist to help those provinces which are regionally disadvantaged to provide public services to attract investment, to attract industry and to enable their populations to have the base of income and of public services to create the wealth and employment that they need in order to reduce the disparities which still persist in this country.

One of the things that worries me in the document of the joint committee is that regional development, according to the majority report, would be transferred to provincial governments. The federal government would in fact not have the authority that it ought to have under the Constitution and that it rightly should have as a national government to promote the interests of all Canadians in particular matters of regional development, those it ought to have under the Constitution.

As a national government it rightly should have to promote the interests of all Canadians in particular matters of regional development, those Canadians who live in disadvantaged or less favourable economic regions of this country. Those situations change over time and the factors influencing them change over time.

• (1820)

In Atlantic Canada, we have persistently suffered as a result of living in a part of the country that has not had the wealth base of the richer provinces such as Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta.

As a result, we have constantly had to endure receiving higher unemployment insurance payments and transfer payments while we attempt to restructure our economies and to build a base that we can use to be actual contributors to the federal government and to other Canadians in the form of equalization payments.

We need in Atlantic Canada more than anywhere else a strong central government that has the ability and the power to act in terms of regional development and in those areas of competency that impact on regional development, impact on the location of economic activity in this country. Then our natural weakness *vis-à-vis* the rest of the country can be counterbalanced by that strong central government.

I am glad in a way that this legislation which has been introduced today only extends the current arrangements and those arrangements which have been negotiated by the Minister of Finance with the provincial governments for another two years.

Hopefully by that time we will have a Liberal government in power which will be in a position to redress the dreadful slide which has occurred over the last eight years in terms of the powers and the abilities of the federal government to act for all Canadians.

In having a government with the will to do so and the will to act in favour of the more disadvantaged regions of this country, we will be able to enable the national government to finally act for all Canadians powerfully and strongly.

Our system of equalization transfers will reflect that. We will not be shy about affirming that responsibility which exists in the Constitution and which needs to be reinforced and backed up by a federal government with the commitment and resources with which to do that.

That is my main point about this legislation. I have not had a chance to look at it in detail, to look at the arrangements that are being made in terms of harmonization of tax systems with the provinces.

I know that the government would like to boast about the fact that the GST will be harmonized with the provinces. That is not something that the federal government should be boasting about. It should be ashamed that it has the GST because the GST has caused so much havoc and so much destruction in the Canadian economy across the country.