

Government Orders

• (1700)

I would like to ask the previous speaker this: Is he aware of Quebec's firm opposition? Will he ask his government colleagues to postpone this bill as long as there is no agreement between the Canadian provinces, in particular with the province of Quebec, for which we are fighting in this House?

[*English*]

Mr. O'Kurley: Mr. Speaker, I listened very attentively to the questions and the comments with regard to my previous intervention in this House. The member from the Bloc Quebecois suggested that his party was here simply to defend the interests of Quebec and said that was the primary reason for its members being here and that they had no other responsibilities whatsoever.

As a member of the legislative committee on Bill C-13 I was curious as to why neither he nor any members of his party attended any of the hearings on Bill C-13. If the interests of Quebec were so important why did it take until this time before he or any of his party members made representation before that committee?

In addition, the Government of Quebec was, as were all provinces, invited to participate in the legislative hearings on Bill C-13. Certainly we did not hear from any representatives of the Government of Quebec on this bill. I am not doubting the hon. member's word but if his responsibility to defend the interests of Quebec is so paramount why did he wait until now to express those concerns or interests?

With regard to the concern about intruding on other jurisdictions, the Supreme Court confirmed that the role of the federal government is legitimate in areas in which the Constitution authorizes the federal government to be involved. I would like to reiterate the fact that Bill C-13 is built on the need for co-operation. The whole intent of this bill is to foster and facilitate co-operation. It is not us and them. It is not me against you. It is we together working to resolve environmental problems which know no provincial boundaries, no jurisdictional boundaries.

I think it is important for the member, and indeed for all of those who have concerns about jurisdiction, to realize that partnership is the essence of this bill.

Certainly that is what the bill was intended for and I am sure that is what it will result in.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nic Leblanc (Longueuil): Mr. Speaker, a few minutes ago, the hon. member accused my colleague of not having taken part in the work of the legislative committee. I want to tell him that we are not welcome as members of the legislative committee nor as members of the various standing committees of the House of Commons. We cannot be blamed because we are not allowed to speak at committee meetings.

We can intervene but we cannot vote. Sometimes, we are forced to wait all day before being given a brief opportunity to speak at the very last moment. That is why it is not very interesting for members of the Bloc Quebecois to sit on a committee. That is why we try to do our work in the House of Commons and to work with the Quebec government since the only reason for our being here is to stand up for Quebec in Ottawa. It is in that context that I blame the hon. member for accusing us of not sitting on committees, because when we do we are not allowed to speak.

[*English*]

Mr. O'Kurley: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I had no intention of doubting the sincerity of the members opposite. My question was with regard to why none of them had appeared at the committee.

What the member said just now is not necessarily 100 per cent accurate in the sense that committee meetings are open to the public. They are open to all individuals who have any interest at all. We have other tools in the parliamentary system such as Standing Order 31 where members of Parliament of all parties of all political stripes can stand up and make representation on behalf of their constituents. We can ask questions in Question Period of ministers.

Not once have I heard the members of the Bloc Quebecois stand up under Standing Order 31 on a statement in the House of Commons before Question Period and express concerns on this issue. Not once have I seen any of those members in the committee even though they are open to the public.