

Government Orders

These criteria gave rise to our party's proposal that the mandate of the auditor general of the environment be given to the office of the auditor general along with the resources it requires to effectively carry out its role.

That is what we proposed at the time. Our proposal was influenced in large measure by the testimony given by the auditor general, Denis Desautels. In testifying before the committee, Mr. Desautels indicated that his office performed the audit duties that would constitute the prime responsibilities of an auditor general of the environment. In other words, the auditor general indicated that he was already involved in environment issues and that he spent \$4.5 million on them annually.

He also felt that his office could take on full responsibility for examining environmental and sustainable development matters with an additional appropriation of \$4.5 million—making a total of \$9 million. The route proposed by the auditor general struck us as the most sensible, simple and effective one to take. The Bloc Quebecois therefore proposed this route, and with Bill C-83 the government confirmed that we were right.

Most committee members were in favour of increasing structures. The Liberal and Reform members advocated, at one and the same time, a new body to be known as the office of the commissioner for the environment and sustainable development and the retention of the auditor general's duties in this area. Liberals and Reformers recommended an office of the environment and of sustainable development, with a budget of \$5 million and staff of 30 professional and 15 support employees.

Also as mentioned in recommendation No. 17 of the report, they wanted to congratulate the auditor general on his initiatives on the environment and urge him to keep up the good work. The committee also recommended amending the Auditor General Act so he would have the appropriate instruments to do his job.

Liberal and Reform Party members on the committee were in favour of a new, specific structure, while maintaining and enhancing another structure with the same responsibilities. This would have been inconsistent, inefficient and very costly. Fortunately, the Bloc made its own proposals, and the Liberal minister listened to us, instead of acting on the recommendations of her own members which would have created duplication and overlap within the federal government.

I am glad that the Bloc and the auditor general opted for a common sense approach in this matter.

I think the Liberal and Reform Party members on the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development do not have a clue what common sense means and what the environmental facts are, and I am referring to problems out there that must be dealt with quickly and effectively.

Another instance of this lack of realism on the part of Liberal and Reform members on the committee could be seen in the report on the quinquennial review of the CEPA, the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

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Liberal and Reform Party members were convinced that it was absolutely necessary to further centralize authority in Ottawa in order to protect the environment. In this report, members opposite and next to us raised several considerations to justify increased centralization of authority in environmental matters. They referred to the growing globalization of environmental problems, the issue of national interest, the increasing importance of international trade and an ecosystem based approach as so many reasons for suggesting that the federal government expand its role and take full responsibility for environmental protection.

With these proposals the committee, in its report on the CEPA—by the way, the Bloc did not agree with the report—ignored the fact that the provinces already had most of the responsibility in this area. The committee, minus the Bloc, takes its cues from the government. They speak the same language, the language of centralization. The federal government wants more power, steadily encroaching on areas that, either directly or indirectly, come under provincial jurisdiction.

This encroachment by the federal government obviously leads to legislative and regulatory duplication which has the effect of setting back and undermining environmental protection. This duplication also causes some reluctance and apprehension among developers who no longer know where they stand. It is not very good for the economy. And this while members opposite keep talking about the economy and creating jobs.

With its increasing propensity for minding the business of the provinces the government is hardly stimulating the economy. In fact, it makes things increasingly difficult for its beloved economy. This is very disturbing. And it is very disturbing for an economy that is supposed to produce all those jobs promised by the Liberals and for the environment, which is in dire need of being protected and renewed.

Is there a way out of this extreme centralist approach? No, not unless we take matters into our own hands as we are about to do in Quebec on October 30. Federalism as such is centralizing, and I would say very much so. This excessive centralization and the manifold duplications it generates means established businesses have to work harder in order to be heard by both levels of government, face double the paper work and are obliged to meet the requirements of two levels of government.