

Government Orders

It is important to point out that if at any particular moment the minister of public works happens to be out of the House we can rest assured that the presence of his parliamentary secretary backstops very well that absence. The same is true in my case. I was away from the House yesterday on business in Vancouver and I had absolutely no compunction in leaving everything related to my department in the hands of my parliamentary secretary who, as I mentioned before, is a person whose skills and ability I have high regard for.

I trust the hon. member will recognize there are ministers in the House from time to time but we have full confidence in the ability of our parliamentary secretaries. If the hon. member was not here to hear the minister and thus had questions about what he did not hear, we would be—

• (1205)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I wonder if I could ask the co-operation of the House on the issue of the absence and presence of members. As we all know the demands on everyone's time are of such a nature that all members are not able to be in the House at all times. I know we would want to extend that respect to one another.

I believe the minister had concluded his remarks. I will now ask—

[*Translation*]

Does the hon. member for Roberval want to add something to the comments of the Minister of National Revenue?

Mr. Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, when a cabinet member hears what he wants to hear, then there is certainly reason for concern.

Remarks that were never part of my speech have just been attributed to me. I never said that the parliamentary secretary was unable to answer questions. Never. Is that what the minister understood? Such behaviour in the House on the part of a minister is cause for concern. I never said any such thing. But I did raise many questions to which the minister was unable to provide explanations in his speech.

The Minister of National Revenue has just told us that the minister has answered all questions asked by the hon. member. Either the minister hears only what he wants to hear or we are facing a problem as far as interpretation or understanding is concerned. There is definitely a problem.

My questions deserve answers. If the parliamentary secretary can answer them, he has only to rise and do so. That is why, considering how time is important in the House, I nevertheless spent 20 minutes to question a project in a reasonable, correct, appropriate and parliamentary manner. I do not want people to

say that I agreed to a project when I really had reservations. I did agree to it but at the same time, I did ask for explanations from the minister. There is nothing wrong with that. This is typical of debates in the House, and I would appreciate a more serious follow up, instead of having someone put words in my mouth.

I cannot understand the minister's approach and, when I look at his answer, I wonder if he understands it himself.

[*English*]

Mrs. Jane Stewart (Brant): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the hon. member's 20 minutes and to the speech given by his leader.

They acknowledge that this is an amendment to the Constitution and with glee seem to recognize the government's recognition of the referendum that occurred on the island and the importance of it.

They seem to be setting this discussion up as a precedent for something. What I did not hear them speak about is the message the minister gave about the importance of this fixed link not only for the people of P.E.I. but for all Canadians.

I would suggest to the hon. member that if they are looking at this discussion today as a precedent for something, they should remember that it is important that things discussed in this House be for the benefit of all Canadians. I would suggest that some of the initiatives which the hon. member might be suggesting in the future will not be for the benefit of all Canadians.

I believe that the direction of the party and its focus on solidifying Quebec may not be for the best of all Canadians, nor in fact for the benefit of all Quebecers. However I hesitate to speak on their behalf. I would like to recommend that to the member and have him remember that when the minister was speaking about the importance of this fixed link, he focused on the value for the whole country.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely flabbergasted. I can hardly respond to what the hon. member has just said, that is, that the results of a referendum on an issue which she considers of national interest should be binding but that those of a referendum held on an issue she does not consider to be of national interest should not have the same value nor should they concern this House in the same way.

Mr. Raymond Lavigne (Verdun—Saint-Paul): True.

Mr. Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, I hear comments to the effect that this is true. That is quite serious. If, for the other side, respect of the democratic process—

An hon. member: We have to listen to this?