

*Government Orders*

When he was Canada's Minister of the Environment, the Bloc Quebecois leader did read the EARP Guidelines Order. He also read the Supreme Court decisions and he quickly realized that if the order were to be applied like an act, as instructed by the courts, the federal government would find itself in an impossible situation. This is why he demanded that a reform be implemented as quickly as possible. I must admit that the Bloc critic did a nice song and dance. She said that the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act was unacceptable because it differs from Bill C-78 which, as you remember, had been submitted to Cabinet by the member for Lac-Saint-Jean just a few days before his sudden resignation from the Conservative government.

• (1735)

For once, the Bloc critic is partially right when she talks about differences. Dozens of amendments were proposed by the House of Commons committee and by the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, which represents the interests of all the provinces regarding environmental issues.

Let us examine the main amendments together briefly. First of all, approximately ten changes to the Bouchard bill were meant to facilitate the alignment of the federal and the provincial processes. Thus, the Minister of the Environment is now required to consult the provinces and to co-operate with them before any review panel is formed. Other amendments give the federal authorities the power to delegate to the provinces the preliminary reviews, the in-depth studies, the mitigation measures and even the follow-up programs.

Therefore, what we have here is a possible delegation of most of the environmental assessments done by the federal government. Some other changes promote public participation. Several clauses were added to restrain the discretion formerly afforded the federal authorities.

The Bouchard bill was amended so that the uncertainties about the implementation of the legislation would be reduced, including in the area of federal activities. But the preamble of that bill was changed to include the concept of sustainable development.

Therefore, the Bloc critic is right. The Bouchard bill was amended in several important ways. I would like her to say, for the benefit of the House, what amendments are rejected by her party. In fact, all of the amendments to this famous bill we just saw and reviewed are consistent with the vision of this government, a vision where the objective is to make sure we can act according to the present policy, based first and foremost on a progressive federalism.

This bill means that we are going to work together with all the provinces and also with the general public, and that is what irks the Official Opposition. This bill is a prime example of how federalism can work when you believe in it. That is the problem with the Official Opposition. When they talk about federalism,

they certainly do not want this system, which is probably the best system in the world, to operate properly. That is why they say every time that if the Leader of the Bloc left the Conservative government at the time, it was because he believed and knew that the system no longer worked.

I think it is too early to throw in the towel on a system that is evolving and responding to the needs of the people. Not just in Quebec but in Canada as well, people say that federalism has problems. My answer to that is thank God federalism has problems, because this means people have changed, people have evolved, and our duty as parliamentarians at the federal level, as members of this House, is to reflect on these changes and get together to ensure that the political system under which we live, that the federal system under which we are evolving also evolves in line with the expectations of the public.

This was just a brief digression. I will get back to the bill.

• (1740)

And if the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act were an attempt by the federal government to encroach on Quebec's jurisdiction, as I said earlier, let the Bloc critic explain why four successive federal Ministers of the Environment came from the Conservative Quebec caucus and were so closely involved in this reform? They designed it, tabled it in the House, made amendments, passed it and defended it during the last federal election. According to the philosophy of the Bloc Quebecois, we would have to say that probably all the Quebecers who were committed to this bill were on the wrong track.

In fact, the question is: Does the Bloc have a monopoly on brains? Were these people who spoke out in favour of the bill all wrong? The answer is simple. As I said earlier, the bill is such an eloquent example of viable federalism that obviously they would be ill-advised to react positively to the bill, since these people, and I am probably repeating myself, are intent on only one thing, and that is the separation of Quebec.

Unfortunately, in the process they have lost the ability to think objectively, thereby jeopardizing the interests of all Quebecers. Well, the people who supported this bill were not all wrong. The comments of the critic for the Bloc Quebecois seem to point to the presence of a transmission belt linking her office with the Quebec government's Department of Intergovernmental Affairs. The problem of the Bloc Quebecois right now is that it is only a mouthpiece. We could say that it is the secretariat of the Parti Quebecois. Members of the Bloc no longer have their own identity, their own way of thinking. They do not have a specific way of being, a specific philosophy. They are like puppets controlled by the government of Quebec which is following a separation agenda.

Since I am informed that time is flying, I will simply say that this bill, like many an initiative from this government, is a highly symbolic expression of dialogue. We proved in the past that when there is a will to co-operate we can progress. Let us remember, for example, the St. Lawrence—Vision 2000 project.