

Government Orders

Normally, I am very disturbed and distressed by this government's basic thrust of dismantling and giving everything away to the provinces, but on this particular issue I see a reversal of form for the government. I see it trying to consolidate the tax collecting in this country. I see it trying to orchestrate or organize a single tax. Quite frankly, if it manages this properly this would put tremendous pressure on each one of the premiers to come onside. Just think of the millions and millions of dollars that this would save in just tax collection.

The Minister of State for Finance and Privatization was talking with me earlier about the harmonization of just the one tax, the GST, in the province of Quebec. I would scrap the GST in a flash if I ever had the chance.

Some hon. members: And do what?

Mr. Mills: Do not bait me with "do what". There are many tax options and tax alternatives out there and I am not going to give you a pitch today on a single tax. There is a difference between single and flat. Under a single tax, we make sure the disadvantaged in our communities are looked after and we make sure in our latest discussion on a single tax that there was a \$100,000 credit for small and medium sized business so that it would decrease the paper burden tremendously.

The point is that there are many options. The member has taken me off my train of thought.

The minister basically said to me that in the province of Quebec alone, just on the GST, through harmonization, there was an administration savings of \$45 million. Just multiply that. I am sure it would be no less in the province of Ontario. Let us say that the rest of the provinces were equal to that. That is a possible \$200 million, \$150 million, \$170 million savings by eliminating duplication of tax collection services.

This is precisely the kind of efficiency that Canadians want to see. This is a situation in which the national government, for once in the last few years, is not relinquishing an administrative procedure to the province, but it is consolidating and refining the tax collection system here at the national level. I think that particular aspect of Bill C-60 should be pursued more aggressively in committee to see if we can work with each other to put pressure on all the premiers to come onside with this

kind of an approach. A single tax system for the entire nation would go a long way toward increasing productivity.

• (1350)

Why do I say productivity? People in this country feel right now with the basic tax system, with so many different layers of taxes from so many different levels of government, that they are being treated unfairly. We know that in many instances they are. Under a system like this, accountability would be a much easier exercise. When people feel they understand a system and can make their governments accountable, they tend to produce more. They tend to be more productive. That, of course, will help our entire economy.

The other thing I propose in this bill is the fact that we make sure certain minimal national standards are maintained. I am a little bit concerned that the exercise of monitoring national standards is slipping away from us. I am concerned that the federal presence in all of the provinces is not being exercised right now. In other words, I am getting a sense that the provincial presence is now basically overtaking the national presence, the federal presence. This eventually is going to lead to a breakdown in our system.

When we have a bill like this where basically the national government is controlling the transfers to the provinces and where many of these transfers are equalization transfers, I wonder if the government should consider having some kind of federal presence formula attached to the transfer. I will be very specific. Naturally, I am concerned about this because of what has gone on in the last week or so where our National Arts Centre orchestra cannot play *O Canada* in the province of Quebec. I cannot imagine a national orchestra, funded by the Canadian taxpayers, coming to Toronto and not being allowed to play the national anthem. It is beyond me.

The reason I am concerned about this federal presence so much is that I wonder if maybe it would not serve all of us a little better if all of the post-secondary schools and hospitals in Canada which are basically receiving through this fund transfers as part of the federal presence were required to put a Canadian flag in front of the