

Government Orders

The main reasons that I will vote against this bill are as follows. First, clause 4 of the bill says that "the powers, duties and functions of the Minister extend to and include all matters over which Parliament has jurisdiction relating to citizenship and immigration" and I emphasize the word "relating".

Obviously, this provision is too vague and too broad. Immigration has always been a shared federal-provincial jurisdiction and Quebec has had its own department and its own minister since 1968.

Knowing the Liberal government's centralizing designs and judging by the inroads already made in these past few months, I fear that the minister and the department will unduly infringe on provincial powers.

• (2045)

I only mention the case of the COFIs here. In this House, we already denounced the minister's attempts to impose on this typically Quebec institution the obligation to promote Canadian unity. What a clear example of meddling in a field of exclusively provincial jurisdiction like education!

The minister is required to respect the agreements signed by the federal government and the provinces, especially in Quebec's case, where the Cullen-Couture agreement and later the McDougall-Gagnon-Tremblay agreement are very specific. I want to warn the minister and tell him that the Bloc Québécois will never allow the minister or his government to meddle in fields of provincial jurisdiction.

I remind you that other laws, including the one passed recently on the Department of Revenue, have specified and defined the minister's powers. Why was it not done in the bill under consideration? Another important provision is clause 5, which says that the minister, with the approval of the Governor in Council, may enter into agreements with any province, group of provinces or any agency thereof or with any foreign government or international organization, for the purpose of facilitating the formulation, coordination and implementation of policies and programs for which the minister is responsible.

We submitted an amendment to eliminate the word "agency" to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. This is the only amendment that was accepted by the Liberal majority, since clearly the government must negotiate and sign agreements with the provincial governments which these agencies come under. We also proposed another amendment requiring the federal government to table the signed agreements in the House. Incredible as it may seem, the Liberal majority defeated this legitimate, very justified amendment.

The Liberals even voted against tabling the agreements signed by ministers with other governments and with international organizations. Nevertheless, the tabling of such agreements is a common, justified practice in the legislatures of all democratic countries, since such agreements sometimes pro-

vide for spending that the legislature is entitled to supervise, monitor and control. The minister and his department should be more open, especially because in his report for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1990, five fiscal years ago, the Auditor General of Canada devoted four chapters to all aspects of the immigration program.

He came to the conclusion that the information provided to Parliament and therefore to the public was incomplete and fragmentary. The other major objection that we have to this bill concerns clause 10, amending the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship Act. This provision gives the Minister of Canadian Heritage and his Secretary of State for Multiculturalism the mandate to promote the Canadian identity. This is a new mandate and we have trouble understanding why the minister added this to a bill which he said is only administrative in nature.

Why this urgency to promote the Canadian identity, if not to fight the sovereigntist movement on the eve of a provincial election in Quebec and a referendum to follow in 1995? Especially because when this government talks about Canadian unity, it denies or ignores the Quebec identity, for all practical purposes.

• (2050)

Another consequence of this provision is that it increases the already existing confusion between the mandate of the Department of Canadian Heritage and the mandate of Citizenship and Immigration. Although this function should be exclusive to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has already begun to appropriate it by proposing new legislation on citizenship which according to him would be aimed at promoting both citizenship and important Canadian values.

Unfortunately, the minister is becoming increasingly obsessed by the issue of Canadian unity. In the process, he is just fanning the flames of controversy between Quebec and English Canada. This discussion is not at all unifying, as the minister seems to think. The failure of federalism is the failure of Canada as a confederation.

Last May the minister raised the rates for immigration services. For instance, an application for permanent residence for refugees, obtaining a visa, a minister's permit, passport, and so forth, all of which creates a lot of problems for refugees who do not have the wherewithal to pay \$500 to obtain permanent residence.

Yesterday, the minister announced new financing measures for immigrant services which will come into effect in 1995-96. The government will not pay the social benefits of teachers who give language courses for new immigrants, although these benefits are included in their collective agreements.