

start cutting there. This would force the provinces to go the same route. It is risky to take the lead and impose certain standards. Federal spending powers mean that the government remains involved in a lot of areas where there is overlap, because of joint standards. We must also realize that taxes raised at both levels are used for the same purpose. The system is not exactly a model of efficiency.

We must be vigilant in this respect, and we intend to monitor this very closely. As I said earlier, I am mainly concerned about the fact that this year, equalization payments will be increased, but with a ceiling, which in our opinion is inefficient. Wait and see what happens next year to the rest of the transfer payments to the provinces, and watch the announcements in the next budget.

I intend to keep today's speech and take it out again and look at it after next year's budget. I am sure there will be some drastic cuts in transfer payments to the provinces. That is an easy prediction to make. It is understandable in the current political climate that we should want to wish to help our federalist friends from Quebec on the other side of the House and support a one-year postponement of cutbacks in transfer payments to the provinces.

In concluding, there are a number of measures that would be appropriate to improve equalization and the system of transfer payments to the provinces, and I will mention a few. Reforms should be carried out in accordance with certain principles. Criticism should be constructive.

First of all, there should be no cuts in transfer payments to the provinces, either in real terms or per capita, to ensure that fairness remains a part of the equation and that the provinces are able to offer quality services to their residents. There is also the question of national standards which do not reflect Quebec's specific needs. National standards have always been a problem. The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot referred to this earlier, and we often hear people talking about problems generated by national or joint standards and the time it takes to solve these problems.

My next point concerns federal interference, especially in matters of provincial jurisdiction, which is another source of inefficiency. Reforms should aim at improved redistribution of revenues among the various provinces, especially in the case of equalization payments. The ceiling on such payments should be removed, since it contradicts the very principles of the system. Reforms should provide incentives for more effective financial management. This measure concerns shared cost programs such as the Canada Assistance Plan.

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These are the principles that would guide us if we had a choice and if the government were willing to change the transfer payments system. Of course, there will be choices to make in Quebec so that eventually we may be ahead of the game. Nevertheless, these principles would be useful for all Canadians. The situation is serious because of the inequities in the system. I will now conclude my speech, Mr. Speaker.

● (1245)

Injustice is often the root cause of disobedience, civil or otherwise, as we have seen in the smuggling issue. People must feel there is fairness in the system. It is not enough to talk about fairness and justice. We must practise what we preach. And we could start right now by removing the ceiling in this bill. It would certainly be an improvement.

For the reasons I mentioned earlier, we cannot support this bill and intend to vote against it.

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works and Government Services): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated some of the comments made by my hon. colleague. I would, however, like to ask him a question. With respect to national standards, it seems to me that the Bloc is truly unaware of what it going on in the world today.

In Europe, for instance, a number of countries have established national standards that go way beyond what had long been in existence as far as different cultures, languages and so forth were concerned. Why this hesitation to go along with national standards? Why can we not sit down together and agree on reasonable national standards and give the provinces the chance to decide how they will meet these standards? Why dismiss or simply ignore what is going on in a number of other countries in the world, not to mention the benefits of having national standards?

There seems to be a feeling that national standards are a bad thing. This is not the case and I would like the hon. member to comment on this point.

Mr. Brien: One should not believe that the Bloc is alone in taking this stand. There is a fairly broad consensus in Quebec on the issue of national standards. One need only look at manpower training to realize how difficult it is to have common programs.

I think that the principle here is not being grasped. When the Meech Lake agreement was signed, there was a willingness to recognize the principle of two nations. Language and culture are not the only things that set a nation apart. Often it is the way things are done. We have different aims and we go about solving certain problems differently. National standards prevent us from achieving our goals since they are defined and often imposed