

*Government Orders**[Translation]*

Nor do we need the kind of statements that are spread around by the Liberal Party of Canada and repeated by the anglophone media, that Quebec is living on handouts from the rest of Canada and is not capable of taking full control of its tax system, legislation and international relations.

The exact opposite is true. In fact, Quebec contributes one quarter of federal revenues and also carries one-quarter of the federal debt, but unfortunately, it receives significantly less than its share of federal spending that creates jobs.

• (1555)

This unfortunately, but unavoidably, leads to proportionately greater unemployment insurance and social security expenditures, so that each federal transfer reduction measure wreaks even greater devastation on Quebec. This is exactly what has been happening in recent years. Per capita federal transfers in constant dollars have dropped significantly in the past few years.

This is why Quebec must take back control of its economic and tax levers at the earliest opportunity. To this end, serious and doubtless difficult negotiations will be required for the needed modernization of the constitutional framework. In the meantime, however, the very last thing we need is a bill that is both a bogus overture to Quebec and a straitjacket that will preclude any constitutional change in the future.

Traditionally, Quebec has always demanded a constitutional veto, and I repeat, constitutional, as protection against amendments to the Constitution which are contrary to its interests.

Let us take a quick look at history and remember that, in the early 1960s, the Fulton-Favreau formula arose out of a constitutional conference. It provided for a veto for the provinces on any constitutional amendment affecting their rights, powers and privileges. In 1971, the Victoria conference proposed a constitutional veto for Quebec, Ontario, two of the maritime provinces and at least two of the western provinces whose combined populations constituted a majority.

The mechanics of Bill C-110 are oddly similar to the Victoria formula, with one exception. In 1971, fourteen years ago, they were talking about a constitutional veto and not a simple legislative measure. It was the former Liberal premier of Quebec, Robert Bourassa, who turned down the Victoria accord, because it did not satisfy Quebecers.

Then, in 1979, the Pepin-Robarts report proposed four regional vetoes, including one for Quebec. In 1982, then Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, with the help of the current Prime Minister, tore up the 1867 Constitution, replacing it with another one, without Quebec's consent. Ever since that time, there has been a crying need for a constitutional veto allowing Quebec to protect itself against amendments that would hurt its interests.

The famous Meech Lake accord, which was supposed to achieve reconciliation between Quebec and the rest of Canada after the 1982 patriation episode, would have given Quebec a veto. We know what happened next. The current Prime Minister torpedoed the accord with the help of Clyde Wells and his associates.

In 1991, Beaudoin-Edwards recommended four regional constitutional vetoes, including one for Quebec; in 1992, Beaudoin-Dobbie also recommended a constitutional veto for Quebec.

Even the Charlottetown accord, which was found clearly lacking by the vast majority of Quebecers in a referendum, would have given Quebec a veto.

• (1600)

As we can see, the constitutional veto demanded by Quebec is a constant political aspiration that has always been at the heart of its minimum requirements. That is why, when the Prime Minister portrayed the Constitution as a path to change and promised a veto, as he did in Montreal, Quebecers were clearly expecting a constitutional veto, since Quebec always talks about this as a minimum.

As we know, giving Quebec a constitutional veto would require the consent of the federal government and the 10 provinces. Yet, according to a recent poll, barely 10 per cent of people in the rest of Canada support a veto for Quebec. The Prime Minister must know that he is in no position to give Quebec a constitutional veto. He also knows that, as he keeps telling everyone in the rest of Canada, a legislative veto is not worth much.

That is why the government performed mental gymnastics to create the illusion that it is offering Quebec a real veto. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. What the Minister of Justice is proposing to this House is not a real veto. In fact, his bill would give Quebec no constitutional protection against constitutional amendments.

Bill C-110 is not a constitutional guarantee that would ensure that Quebec will be protected in the future. You and I know that the government in place could repeal this bill at will. In fact, that is exactly what the Reform Party said it would do upon taking office. This goes to show how tenuous the protection offered by Bill C-110 would be.

The federal government has some gall to talk about a veto when in fact what it is offering Quebec is all wind, an illusion. Worse yet, it actually guarantees that no constitutional change benefiting Quebec will ever be approved, since all it will take is for another veto right holder to object to nip any reform attempt in the bud. With Bill C-110, we can be sure that the federal system will be even more impossible to change than ever before, until such time as the government grows tired of resisting and finally decides to repeal the miserable act.

What this government has come up with is at best a sort of self-censorship that is only binding on this government, if at all. In fact, with this stroke of inspiration, the Prime Minister will have managed, if only briefly, to make the Canadian federal