

Government Orders

promoting French Canadian and Quebec culture throughout the world.

[English]

Mr. John Duncan (North Island—Powell River): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to participate in the debate on Bill C-53.

The debate we just listened to reminds me very much of the failure of federal spending. It is no different on job creation from what it is on cultural matters. If federal spending created jobs, every Canadian would have two. If federal spending helped on some of these cultural matters, people would not be voting by turning off their television sets when it comes to a lot of the programming on CBC.

• (1610)

Bill C-53 is one multifaceted attempt to right every perceived wrong in the government's quest for political correctness. It is a continuation of hyphenated Canadians and funding of special interest groups which in the final analysis has hardly promoted unity and has only been a drain on the public purse.

Nowhere in Bill C-53 can I detect any change in this litany of throwing money at something we are desperately trying to understand. It seems that government thinks it can buy peace and unity by entrenching more rights and latitude for special interest groups. When are we going to become Canadians rather than a mishmash of individuals with a particular axe to grind?

While I am on that topic of special interest groups, it might not be as bad if more members of the special interest groups were beneficiaries. Too often a few greedy, self-serving individuals who head up the leadership of these groups are the main recipients.

I am told that one individual who is paid a \$60,000 a year salary to head one of these groups, a person in their thirties is nearly a millionaire. Is this where the funding for some of these groups is going: membership at the Rideau Club, first class air travel, cottages in the Gatineau?

Bill C-53 will not correct this injustice but will only entrench it further. One has to simply take a cursory look at the 1994-95 estimates for Canadian heritage. Every conceivable special interest group is on the payroll. What is the effectiveness of these programs? Is there demonstrable success to parallel their mandates? Are they accountable or merely sinkholes of largesse? My Reform colleagues will chronicle the misplacement of funding in this debate.

I would now like to turn to an element of responsibility of the Department of Canadian Heritage as contained in Bill C-53,

specifically Canada's Metis. The department mandate states that the programs for Metis are designed to help the Metis define and participate in the resolution of the social, cultural, political and economic issues affecting their lives in Canadian society. A common feature of the program is that projects are community based and are initiated and managed by aboriginal people.

I can count some \$40 million directed at those programs. Is it being used on what is intended? Is it accountable? One does not have to do much research before one's antennae beam on specific examples where accountability is questionable. I refer to the Metis nation of Saskatchewan.

Last March and April headlines in regional Saskatchewan and national newspapers screamed out headlines of mismanagement of funds, accounting anomalies and refusal by Metis leaders to co-operate with audits. At one point over \$1 million was unaccountable. No one questioned the legality of the Metis in this circumstance; they did question accountability and proper management of funds.

It seems in government quests to keep everyone happy, we make the cheques and never ask another question. When someone stumbles over some anomaly regarding procedures, we get the whitewash. The bureaucrats and some antsy national Metis council officials get on the damage control mode. This is not good enough. Bill C-53 does not improve on it. What the cloud of uncertainty over the Metis Society of Saskatchewan did was create a splinter group of concerned Metis citizens. It seems they too felt that those Metis leaders handling the funds at the local level did not have the capacity to do it and it reflected badly on the members. Bill C-53 does not address this; it entrenches further mismanagement.

• (1615)

In preparation for this debate, my office called a few departmental people, research officers appointed to and in these debates, and naturally talked to others interested in this subject matter. Is it not interesting that I still do not have a bottom line on funding through Heritage Canada to the Metis. I really do not think Bill C-53 will contribute to enlightening the House any further on this issue.

Other newspaper headlines suggest that Metis leaders are ignorant of public trust, that funding provided through Heritage Canada for programs and activities of Metis groups, often for worthy undertakings, may not be trickling down from the Metis leaders in charge of disbursing funds. It is simply not good enough to concentrate control of funds with the leadership. It would be better to have these funds administered by a council or committee made up of all strata within the Metis society.