

*Government Orders*

with this legislation. It is also the main problem with the current government. It is the main problem facing Canadian politics.

Basically, the government has a serious credibility problem. Of course, it did not start with the current government. The Conservatives before them had the same problem. This is an image problem. Elected representatives and the government are accused of mismanaging public funds. Canadians accuse them of waste and patronage and they are right, since the national debt is reaching the \$600 billion mark and the deficit exceeds \$40 billion.

• (1045)

Besides, the government has a serious debt problem, so much so that the International Monetary Fund is about to intervene. From a debt and deficit point of view, Canada is in a critical situation. Bill C-52 gives us a great opportunity to reduce waste in the thousands of contracts that are granted in Canada and, in doing so, to reduce our debt and deficit. But we do not take advantage of it.

As everybody knows, we are faced with a very serious problem, which affects politics in general. Politicians themselves have lost most of their credibility with the public at large, precisely because of this loose management of the public funds, which conjures up stories of patronage, abuse and waste. It is not surprising that Canadians call us hypocrites, crooks and liars and accuse us of not doing our job as their elected representatives.

It is a serious problem because that loss of confidence by the people in their elected representatives challenges the very basis of our democracy. When the uncertainty and the lack of confidence felt by Canadians is such that it weakens our democratic institutions, then it becomes a serious problem.

The government could have seen Bill C-52 as an opportunity to address these concerns, to show Canadians that it is taking action to reduce waste and overspending, but it has not done so.

This bill could have been used to make the government more open, which is essential if we want members of Parliament to regain some credibility. I think that openness was one of the first concerns expressed by the government when it was elected last October. The Liberals promised Canadians that there would be a certain level of ethics within their government, and that is why the Prime Minister appointed a former Liberal minister to see to it that his ministers follow this code of ethics. Openness is mentioned in the red book, although not on the first page. I will read to you an excerpt from page 95 of the red book that most Liberal members are very familiar with. It says: "We will follow the basic principle that government decisions must be made on the merits of a case rather than according to the political influence of those making the case. We will take an

approach of openness in decision-making. A Liberal government will not allow the public agenda to be dominated by lobbyists as it has been since the Conservatives took office".

The Conservatives are being accused of patronage and lack of openness, but we see no change. The present government is not doing anything to address the problem and does not even seem willing to do something about it. Bill C-52 is a perfect example of this unwillingness on the part of the government. The Liberals could have given some teeth to this bill to put an end to the waste and misuse of taxpayers' money, but it has not done so.

• (1050)

It is disappointing because today, as I said earlier, the general public has grave doubts about the effectiveness of its elected representatives and the federal system. In fact, that is one of the reasons why Quebec wants sovereignty, and will become sovereign, because it looks like the federal system is unable to adjust.

Government members show no indication that they want to improve the system. Consider lobbying, for instance, where there has been considerable abuse. This week, the government which, as I just mentioned, said in the red book that it wanted to restrict the influence of lobbyists, again gave in to the lobbyists, who scored at least two points on the restrictions the government wanted to impose on them. The lobbyists managed to avoid having to disclose their fees, and corporations may deduct lobbyists' fees from corporate income tax. This is one more example of a government that lacks the political will to deal with the real problems.

We had a whole series of events just this week which clearly reflected the government's lack of concern for the problems of Canadians. Yesterday we found, for instance, that the Prime Minister had purposely withheld information about federal compensation for the cost of the 1992 referendum in Quebec. The government has shown a preference for secrecy and an utter lack of transparency.

Consider the Pearson Airport controversy. Granted, the government cancelled this contract or attempt at privatization because it had to stop this kind of abuse, but it is trying to ensure that the parties concerned receive quite substantial compensation. The government is compensating lobbyists. It is compensating private interests. Even the Senate, in this particular case, suggested paying up to \$45 million to the people involved in the privatization of Pearson airport, which is abuse of public funds. The Senate itself is another case of this kind of abuse, of wasting taxpayers money: we have 104 senators sitting around doing nothing, who are paid \$70,000 a year, spend \$500,000 each and as a result cost the public Treasury a total of \$50 million. This is a horrific waste of money in a country that is already carrying an extremely heavy debt load. We know the senators are just