

The Address

to Parliament. I had the privilege of meeting him at conferences when we were both members of provincial legislatures; I do not recall whether it was at the International Assembly of French-Speaking Parliamentarians or at other forums. In any case, I am glad to see him here.

I would like to ask him a question which is rather relevant, I think. A few minutes ago, he said in his remarks that the minister responsible for federal-provincial issues had said yes in more ways than one, I won't repeat them all, to initiatives aimed at avoiding duplication. According to the member, we have heard it only too often and things have been dragging on for far too long since the Liberals came to power.

• (2015)

Did the member forget that today is the first one of the session and that there was only one answer and that it was yes? If the member is not satisfied with a positive answer, can we conclude that he would have preferred a negative one that would have boosted his position and allowed him to say that the federal government is unwilling to do anything for them, thereby pointing out the failure of federalism? In other words he is saying to us that a yes is not enough, that things have been going on for too long. The first day in Parliament, we said yes right away, but even that took too long. Maybe we should have said yes before the question was asked? Perhaps that is the solution.

Mr. Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, to whom I give my regards, for asking for clarifications. We have indeed met previously in another forum.

There is something we have to understand, and I am happy that my colleague has asked that question because it might help other ministers than the minister responsible for federal-provincial matters. This government has had a problem since the election and I am glad to be able to tell you how that is seen from the outside. The government gives the impression that no one in its ranks is able to take a firm stand. One day they create a program, for instance the infrastructure program. The government announces an infrastructure program, which is interesting enough. They tell us that there may be negotiations, that there might be developments and that they will give details later on these aspects; that they will make the criteria known and that provincial governments will be asked to contribute. The problem is there is never anything clear.

Regarding duplication, the minister I asked omitted to explain today a declaration he made yesterday, although a few months ago he had clearly and firmly announced his intention of dealing with the question of duplication of responsibilities with Quebec. Only a few hours ago the same minister declared that the

question of labour agreements has now become less urgent. The minister said he prefers to wait and examine those questions in the light of the general review of social programs that has to be done. That could take up to two years.

Then I tried, unsuccessfully, to find out if the minister would proceed rapidly. For each minute that passes we lose millions of dollars. What we want is determination and clear and precise answers. People watching us are fed up with half-measures. They want real measures. That is why I was not happy with the answer. I would have liked some reassurance from the minister. I would have liked to hear a determined minister saying: "Yes, I am glad to announce that every effort is now made to settle the issue of overlapping jurisdictions and duplication regarding employment, because every Quebecer wants us to do so". Just ask the new premier of Quebec—a liberal and federalist premier. He will tell you how dissatisfied and disappointed he is about the way this government is dealing with the matter. That is the problem.

I told the minister today what we want from the government: "Just make a decision! Choose an option! Yes or no, will you make changes in the social programs? Just say so! Yes or no, will you cut the transfers to the provinces? We want an answer". That is what people want to know. They do not want to hear, according to circumstances, yes or no, a little bit or a lot, not much and not too much. Make a decision, that is what matters to us.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Colleagues, I want to take a moment on this, my first occasion as one of your associate Speakers, to thank my constituents of Stormont—Dundas for returning me here to the House of Commons.

[Translation]

I want to thank my constituents of Stormont—Dundas for their trust and I undertake to do my utmost in their service.

[English]

An inspiration to me in my new functions here in Parliament in the chair will be a former member for Stormont—Dundas, the Hon. Lucien Lamoureux, who was the Speaker of this House for several years.

[Translation]

I congratulate you all and wish you success in this Parliament.

[English]

I congratulate all of you on your election to this 35th Parliament.