

The Address

• (1605)

The government will no doubt retort that it does not have the resources to invest in economic recovery. That is tantamount to acknowledging a lack of political courage and administrative stringency. Indeed, it is possible to reduce the deficit while leaving room to manoeuvre. To do that, you have to decide once and for all to cut spending. But the will to do so is lacking. We agree as to the diagnosis, but not as to the treatment.

The Bloc Québécois is willing to support an ambitious deficit cutting plan, but not just any one. We cannot ignore the origin of the present national debt. We cannot forget that the federal government was the first one to open wide the gates in the early 1980's, leading to this spiralling public debt. As we all know, on March 31, 1994, the net debt will reach \$507 billion whereas the combined debt of all the provinces will be less than \$170 billion. This explains why, a few years ago, the federal government decided to unload part of the federal deficit on the provinces.

In view of this heavy responsibility, the federal government should show the way rather than impose its will by decree. Before considering shrinking the social safety net, before passing the buck to the provinces, the federal government must first put its own house in order. It could follow two very different paths. Ridding the federal administration of its fat could be done very quickly by eliminating useless trips, contracts awarded to private interests, friends and friends of friends, extravagant spending here and abroad, and by taking into account the horror stories which have been listed, year after year, by the Auditor General in his annual report.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Bouchard: Good resolutions, noble intentions to let parliamentarians speak do not last long, do they? They cannot even wait for the end of the first real sitting day, for the end of the speech by the Leader of the Opposition to start hurling insults.

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order. I would hope hon. members would hear each other out in the debates as much as possible.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bouchard: That would require a thorough and detailed study of each and every department's internal expenses. We all know how much the bureaucracy is unwilling to curb its appetite. Restraint will have to be imposed from the outside; in other words, it will have to come from the Canadian Parliament. The government has expressed its willingness to increase the responsibilities of this House. We take them at their word. We ask that they abide by that promise in a very concrete and significant manner. A meticulous analysis of these expenditures by a parliamentary commission representing all of us in

this House would be proof of the government's good faith and would allow us to seriously inform the public as to the extent of the excessive expenses within government itself.

The whole issue of national defence will have to be rethought in the light of the new geopolitical world map. The Bloc Québécois will closely follow the federal task force in charge of this operation. Meanwhile, however, all capital expenditures should be frozen.

This is only part of the way of life of our government. There is another aspect which was omitted in the Speech from the Throne. The federal government refuses to recognize the real scope of it, that is the duplication of federal and provincial activities. What exactly is the cost of that constant grappling between the federal and the provinces?

A curious turnaround occurred in the way even the most fervent federalists themselves analyze the operation of the present system. Until recently, they praised the government for having achieved the optimum sharing of powers between the two levels. But we cannot keep on deluding ourselves; it is quite common now for people to denounce the bureaucratic duplication and the waste it causes.

• (1610)

In 1991 the Canadian Treasury Board conducted a study of overlapping federal and provincial programs. The study involved 453 different federal programs in 119 Departments, Crown corporations or other federal organizations, with a total budget of \$96 billion. Forty-five per cent of these programs, which account for \$40 billion in expenditures, overlapped directly with provincial programs.

In other words, overlapping is the rule rather than the exception. The Bélanger-Campeau Commission concluded that if we could do away with this situation, we could save billions of dollars. According to the Quebec government itself, in the area of manpower and employment training alone, the overlapping is costing Quebec taxpayers \$250 million a year. The federal and provincial structures in the field of manpower adjustment and training services include more than 50 programs and sub-programs for the same people who are thus left to wander in a maze of services.

Right now, in Quebec, we are in the incredible situation whereby 75,000 to 90,000 jobs cannot be filled due to a lack of skilled labour, when over 25,000 Quebecers are waiting to be trained.

This is at the heart of the dysfunctional federalism and the legitimacy crisis which is paralysing Canada. This administrative mess comes from the very nature of the system. However, this is also a sign of the willingness of the government to tolerate waste. Here is a real bonanza, an opportunity to save money and increase efficiency at all levels of government. But the federal government refuses because of its centralising