

Government Orders

Could he share with us what concrete recommendations he and his party have for balancing the books, as the six provinces have done, and for reducing the public debt eventually to zero?

• (1025)

[Translation]

Mr. Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his question. Obviously, it is quite clear to me how we should go about balancing the books. Those of us on this side of the House are convinced of the need to implement the principle of subsidiarity, whereby the mandate to deliver a service should go to the level of government in the best position to do so. The problem with Canada, and, with all due respect, the problem with the government's logic, is that all that is being offered is an observation. The observation is made that we have a debt of \$600 billion, but no questions are asked about the institutional structure that led up to this debt.

Let us not forget that the federal government used to have a department of urban affairs and a department of recreation, and that is why we have the debt we do today. It is because of an imbalance that allows Ottawa to interfere in areas of jurisdiction for which it has no mandate. This is the spending power system. Unfortunately, the federalism we are seeing leaves much to be desired. This is not to say that federalism could not be interesting in theory, but for it to work in the Canadian context, it must be centralized. And for it to be centralized, interference in the affairs of the provinces becomes necessary.

My hon. colleague would be interested to know that before the Department of Health even gets around to delivering a service, a billion dollars has been set aside by the Minister of Finance for its operating expenses. Does my hon. colleague share my concern, my disbelief that Health Canada has more employees than the provincial departments of health? This is not what we should be seeing when it is not even the federal government's mandate.

The best way to reduce the debt, and I do not know whether my colleague will agree with us, is to undertake a political reorganization with the goal of establishing an association between two nations, two autonomous governments, who will obviously have economic dealings with each other where interests dictate, because we know that nations must put interests ahead of feelings. I think that the best way for Canada to reduce the debt is through an extensive political reorganization.

[English]

Mr. Flis: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is contradicting himself. He said that to have a healthy federalism we have to centralize things more. On the other hand, he is talking about two nations.

My wife comes from the province of Quebec. She has many relatives there, nieces, nephews, and we meet with them quite regularly. I am so proud of Canada when my nieces and nephews visit us and speak three languages. They speak French, English and Polish.

Is it not wonderful that in a country such as ours, in la belle province, people can grow up fluent in three languages? If we nourish this further, we will be the envy of the world. The United Nations has named Canada as the number one place on this planet in which to live. Why would the hon. member talk about two nations? It took us 125 years to reach the level we are at now. Now that the world recognizes that we did this properly and Canadians have the best standard of living, why would we want to dismantle this?

I would remind the hon. member also to talk to the ambassadors here in Ottawa of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. I keep in very close touch with them. They went through the same phase. When they were talking about separation they were talking about the same currency, no obstacles at the border, common defence and so on. The minute they separated they had to print their own currency, they had very strict custom controls. It was the most painful thing they had ever gone through. They are recommending not to let happen to Canada what happened to the former Czechoslovakia.

• (1030)

I am wondering if the hon. member would rethink and answer who is representing my nieces, my nephews, my grand-nieces, my grand-nephews because they do not want two nations. They want to live and grow in this beautiful country as it is now. They do not want to move out of la belle province but they will if we go the two nation route.

[Translation]

Mr. Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I know that my colleague is a generous and intelligent man, so I am disappointed with his comparison. I wish to tell him that, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, 21 countries have achieved sovereignty and, out of these 21 countries, it is easy to talk about the economic difficulties experienced by Slovakia. On the other hand, I can give him a list of 20 countries which, not in the distant past but since the fall of the Berlin Wall, have managed their sovereignty successfully. We will have the opportunity to talk about this again later.

I wish to address one element of my colleague's question. What I told the hon. parliamentary secretary is that there are several examples of federalism in the world. Canadian federalism has two distinctive features. Canada is a continental country, unlike the other federalist countries we are familiar with. It is a continental country with two nations. Since being elected to this House, I have seen that there is a gap between the parties. On this side, because we are in touch with Quebec, we know that we are a nation.