

Government Orders

I had the honour of being chief advisor to Jean-Luc Pepin in the preparation of his report on the Constitution along with John Robarts, Léon Dion and John Meisel. If his report had been adopted many of our problems of federalism today would have been resolved before.

• (1105)

The quest goes on for the right people. Please, the invitation goes to members of the government and members of the opposition to put forward the names. This is intended to be independent. It will only be independent and courageous if we get the right people. The minister is on the right track. They do not have to be lawyers. It is a challenge. We have given so much time to Quebec issues that very much of our creative energy in other areas has been pre-empted. If we do not modernize our own laws the problem of economic recovery will be very much accentuated.

I see no point in my telling Chinese audiences, as I did from 1980 onwards, or audiences in other countries that if you want a free market economy, you need streamlined, up to date laws that respond to the exigencies of the society you are living in. There is no point telling these people that if we do not do it at home. This is the message in the law reform bill. Please see the large issue, see the necessity for this and take the steps to ensure the choices will be excellent ones.

Mr. Dick Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill C-106 today. I listened to my hon. friend from Vancouver Quadra make his presentation. I have the utmost respect for him. He is a man of much accomplishment in his career. He is certainly an academic and has contributed a lot to his profession and has many accomplishments.

I have one fear, though, as I listen to the hon. member, that the average Canadian is not getting a grasp or is not able to understand exactly what the member is saying. I want to bring this debate away from the level used by hon. member from Vancouver Quadra, a level which, no disrespect intended, was far above the average Canadian.

The hon. member talked about the people who should be involved in this commission. I will use some of his words and reflect on what he said. He said the law commission should be comprised of people in the law profession and people of high intellectual distinction.

Nowhere in his presentation has he indicated in any way that the opinions reflected by the minds of average Canadians should be represented in the commission. That has been the problem with the Minister of Justice's decisions and the government's bills in the two years I have been in the House. Nowhere in the bills introduced has there been any sense of realism between what is in the bill and what is on the mind of the average Canadian.

As parliamentarians we have a profound responsibility first and foremost to represent the concerns and the opinions of average Canadians. This recreation of the law commission is certainly far from that.

The predecessor to the law commission was abolished by the Tories in 1992. The Tory government was never known to be frugal but for some reason it found the commission a luxury it could not afford, which was a surprise considering its record of spending. It had grown as a quite natural progression into a large bureaucracy.

• (1110)

The Tory government in its wisdom decided it could get the same advice from outside sources at a better price. No doubt those outside sources were Tory advisers because the old line parties have a habit of rewarding their friends after they get into government. I have no doubt that this recreation of the law commission is another form of thanking Liberal friends for their participation in helping them get to government. We have seen this over and over again.

The law commission was established in 1971 to review Canadian federal laws and to make recommendations for the improvement or modernization of reforms within the justice system and develop new approaches that would be responsive to the changing needs of Canadian society.

In all honesty we have not seen a lot of evidence that the former law commission responded to the concerns of average Canadians. Its recommendations and work seemed to come out of some academic legal nirvana in which the recommendations were made on behalf of the people of Canada because, in all honesty, as the people formerly of the law commission would probably rightly determine, the Canadian people do not really have the wherewithal to make up their own minds and make reasonable choices about how the justice system in Canada should operate.

At its elimination in 1992, the commission had a budget of about \$5 million and a staff of about 30. That was a lot of money. Now the Liberal government wants to revive this law commission. It has set a budget with a benchmark of about \$3 million a year. It says the money will come from existing government resources. Anyone who believes that tale I honestly think believes in the tooth fairy; a wilder belief is maybe the Liberal government will some day get its spending under control.

The Liberal government is simply adding another level of bureaucracy to government operations. We have seen over and over again commissions with budget overruns like it is the natural thing to do.

The Canadian people have no reason to believe this commission will not be independent. It will not be accountable to the government except to the wishes of the Minister of Justice.