

*The Address*

The Maastricht treaty extended the process of economic integration to the field of monetary policy by setting the objective of a common currency before the end of the century, and the process of political co-operation by specifying the objective of a common thread in the fields of defence and foreign policy. These sensitive fields will remain the prerogative of the heads of state assembled in the European Council.

• (1600)

Hence the following question: If the European union is indeed the wave of the future as is frequently alleged in the Canadian media, why not propose this model as a solution to Canada's national problem? If Maastricht represents the embodiment of the next century, why does English Canada not propose the same kind of arrangement to Quebec? The Maastricht arrangements would be much easier to implement between Quebec and Canada than among 12 very diverse countries.

*[Translation]*

Let there be no mistake. Bloc members will not forget that their commitment to sovereignty constitutes the real reason for their presence in this House. One could say that as far as we are concerned, the pre-referendum campaign has begun. Meanwhile, we will not let the recession be dissociated from its causes.

For the time being, and until Quebecers have made their decision in a referendum, members of the Bloc will seek to safeguard the future by averting present evils to the best of their ability. These evils include unemployment, poverty, lack of budgetary restraint, undue duplication, threats to our social programs, fiscal inequity and loss of confidence in our political institutions and leaders.

All these issues have a direct impact on Quebec's interests but are equally important for the rest of Canada. Our aspirations drive us apart, but our social, economic and budgetary problems are the same.

*[English]*

As Premier Bob Rae would say: "We are all in the same boat".

*[Translation]*

Who can challenge the legitimacy, even for the whole at Canada, of any action the Bloc may take to limit the damage, create jobs, wrestle with the deficit and fight off attacks against our social programs? The universal character of these concerns confers a clear legitimacy on a common response to these issues. In addition, we received an electoral mandate. Our 54 seats were allocated by the principal players: the electorate. Do these seats have any less clout because they come from Quebec?

I can already hear our opponents claiming that it was only thanks to an erratic division of seats of English Canada between the Liberals and Reform members that the Bloc was able to come to the fore with the second largest number of members. However, the impact of spoilers and how this translates to the electoral map is also an expression of the will of the electorate. It was a combination of all votes, whether they were from Quebec or the rest of Canada, which made us the Official Opposition. To criticise the fact that this responsibility has now been taken over by the Bloc Quebecois shows a lack of respect for the democratic process as a whole.

We intend to take these responsibilities seriously; and we will do so loyally, correctly and with due resolve. We know that is what Quebecers expect us to do, and they would never forgive us if we deviated from this path.

In this respect, we are guided by two principles: equity and responsibility. On both counts, the speech from the throne was a complete disappointment. At a time when more than one child out of six and one family out of eight are living below the poverty line in this country, when a million and a half people are unemployed, and when more and more people in Quebec see this as proof of the failure of Canadian federalism, one would expect the new government to stage a strong and spectacular rally.

There is a general and widespread feeling of disappointment, both among the needy, breadwinners, young people and seniors, and also among business people and investors.

All were anxious to know what specific measures would be taken to put Canadians back to work. Unfortunately, the government merely served up a condensed version of its little red book. The first hundred days of this government will not go down in history.

Analyse though we may, we will find none of the answers we expected in the speech from the throne.

Is there anything in the way of projects that hold out some hope? Nothing. The talk goes on about municipal infrastructures. It may be useful, but the program falls tragically short of what it would take to jump start the economy. The government has failed to understand how important it is to give people hope. How can the unemployed take heart, how can decision makers consider investing when the government is not even aware of the seriousness of the situation? When it should have taken drastic measures such as starting work on the high-speed rail link between Windsor and Quebec City, transferring labour training programs and resources to Quebec, where all parties have been lobbying for it for a long time, when it should have set up a fund to convert military industry to civilian uses, when it should have taken so many measures, the government chose to be content with publishing yet another pamphlet filled with vague electioneering propaganda.