

Government Orders

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker: Colleagues, before I leave the Chair this may be the last sitting day. I do not say that it is. As usual, your Speaker is hosting a small reception for all parliamentarians and our pages in Room 216. I cordially invite all of you to join me there when the time permits.

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BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT BANK OF CANADA ACT

Hon. Herb Gray (for Minister of Industry) moved that Bill C-91, an act to continue the Federal Business Development Bank under the name Business Development Bank of Canada, as amended, be read the third time and passed.

• (1635)

Mr. Dennis J. Mills (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say to the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, the industry critic for the Bloc Quebecois, and the hon. member for Edmonton Southwest who is the industry critic for the Reform Party that the government appreciates the co-operation on this bill. If we were not able to get this bill through today, it would have had an adverse impact not just on the bank as we know it but also on meeting the objectives of helping small and medium sized business over the next three or four months as we adjourn this House of Commons.

As we have debated over the last couple of days, the new Business Development Bank of Canada has been given a new mandate. This new mandate allows the capital of the bank to increase substantially to close to \$18 billion. It also means that the bank can be a real force in this country in a complementary way in supporting other financial institutions.

We also have to acknowledge that the bank is not just there to help in making loans to small business. It is also there as a counselling assistance bank. Very few Canadians realize that one of the unique features of the Business Development Bank of Canada is that it has one of the most sophisticated counselling assistance programs in any financial institution right across Canada.

We have given an undertaking that by allowing this bill to proceed quickly today with swift passage, that we on this side of the House will not accelerate the activity of the bank in the province of Quebec before the referendum unless the Bloc changes its mind and wants the bank to be much more aggressive in its lending activities and its presence. That option is there for the Bloc to decide whether or not it wants more activity by the bank before the referendum or if it would like us to wait until after. That decision is with the Bloc and we will honour that commitment.

On behalf of all government members and of course all of our members on the industry committee we have worked as a team in designing this bill and putting it through the House of Commons. Without the opposition's co-operation we could not have

had such swift passage. This is an example where all of us are working together to get this economy going.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak about this bill at third reading, in slightly peculiar circumstances. I would like to state right now that it is only in the interest of Quebecers that we are going along with the government today.

What we would have preferred was for the Federal Business Development Bank to continue as it was before, with a mandate to simply stimulate economic development. We do not want to fundamentally change the rules of the game and create a new small business bank in Canada, as this bill proposes.

There is a fallacy in its very title, because the title does not match its contents, the scope of the bill. The first thing, of course, is the name change: from the Federal Business Development Bank to the Business Development Bank of Canada. That is a little pretentious, a little too pretentious, presumptuous. This was not reflected anywhere in the committee's discussions and debates. In addition, changing the name will be a frivolous waste of time and money.

More serious still, it would change the Federal Business Development Bank's mandate which, up to now, was well appreciated by Quebecers. It would go from being the economic development bank that it was, the last resort bank for a specific clientele, for a very specific market, to a bank which offers complementary financing. We are fundamentally changing what defined it, what gave it its character as a last resort bank.

• (1640)

The bank's role will be changed. There will be changes in the culture of a bank whose primary mandate was to promote the creation and expansion of small business, the culture of economic development. The changes will be subtle, as the new Business Development Bank of Canada seeks financing from the private sector and—this is of major concern to the Bloc Quebecois—will have to be profit-oriented, considering the rates of interest it will have to pay private investors, who will now be invited to invest in the bank. This will bring about a thorough change in the philosophy of the Business Development Bank of Canada, a bank that in our opinion is set to become a commercial bank with a culture that will be more concerned about making profits than just breaking even, as was formerly the case.

Furthermore, and this is probably the most negative development from our point of view, this bill ushers in an unprecedented offensive by the federal government in the sector of regional development, a sector where Quebec has excellent resources and a reputation for its expertise. The federal government, without consulting with Quebec or the other provinces, has the gall to indicate in the bill that it will deal directly with provincial agencies, which are creatures of the provinces, including in Quebec, although Quebec has legislation that regulates relations between provincial agencies—creatures of the Government of Quebec—and the federal government. This is supposed to be done through the Government of Quebec, and now the federal