

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have confidence in the Minister of National Defence and the Chief of Defence Staff. We are now discussing a problem that arose in Somalia before we formed the government. We will try to get to the bottom of this. We took the initiative to have an inquiry on the subject, and I think that so far, the minister, the Chief of Defence Staff and particularly the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of National Defence are all doing an excellent job.

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MANPOWER TRAINING

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely incredible to see the Minister of Human Resources Development talk about the Quebec government's refusal to co-operate on manpower issues when at this very moment, he has a bill in which he assumes powers he never had before, which constitute an incredible and unprecedented invasion of the jurisdiction of the Government of Quebec over manpower. So much so that it was even criticized by hard core federalists in Quebec. You can only go so far.

Would the Minister of Human Resources Development agree that this bill marks the first time the federal government acquires the legal authority to go directly over the head of the Government of Quebec? Will he admit it?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is being a little silly, frankly.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: I would ask all hon. members to please choose their words carefully.

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I will rephrase it to say the hon. member has strayed substantially from the line of logic and reason.

I simply quote to him clause 6 of the bill. It is in black and white: "The powers, duties and functions of the minister extend and include matters over which Parliament has jurisdiction". That is the existing act. There is no difference. Nothing has changed. Nothing is altered. Nothing is amended. Everything is the same. We simply are able to work out the kinds of agreements and arrangements with provinces that the department of labour, the department of employment and immigration, the department of welfare, parts of the department that used to be in citizenship have all done over the past 30, 40, 50 years. Nothing has changed. We are working on the legislative base that exists. We are simply consolidating the powers because the department has been consolidated.

• (1440)

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is really too bad that the Minister of Human Resources Development should stoop to name-calling, the logic of the weak, the logic of those who have nothing to say. He would be better off answering the question. We would rather have answers than arrogance. Quebecers would appreciate that.

I will direct my question to the Prime Minister, and maybe then I will get an answer. Would the Prime Minister agree that the bill introduced by his Minister of Human Resources Development is a perfect illustration of the federalism by administrative agreement he is proposing to Quebecers, in other words: first step, Ottawa assumes all powers over a given jurisdiction; second step, it asks the provinces to come and beg to have these powers back, and third, I am sorry to add, he calls them names when they do?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister just explained very clearly something that is quite straightforward. A number of departments were amalgamated to put all human resources together. The powers given to the minister are the same as they were in each department separately.

The bill clearly says that no new powers have been given to the minister. What we are trying to do is use certain decisions and administrative agreements, which will necessary vary from province to province because some are more interested than others, as a way to make adjustments appropriate to the needs and wishes of each province.

This is federalism at its most flexible, and there is no—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): Especially since they keep saying we are empire building. Again, I want to say that we have just cut 45,000 jobs within the federal government. That is not because we want more power and more bureaucrats. The minister eliminated 5,000 jobs in his own department to make his operations even more effective and less costly for the people of this country. We are accused of empire building, when we are being extremely accommodating.

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[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the IMF said yesterday that the government should move faster to reduce the federal deficit to safeguard economic growth. The Auditor General of Canada said today that longer term targets for debt should be identified beyond the two-year rolling targets that have been put forth by the Minister of Finance.