

*Government Orders*

That the National Assembly of Quebec ask Mr. Jean Chrétien and the federal Liberal government to abide by the unanimous consensus among all concerned in Quebec on the need for Quebec to have exclusive jurisdiction over manpower training.

It does not sound like a whim to me, yet it is said to be so in the case of the Parliament representing the only majority French-speaking nation in North America. It seems to me that some attention should be paid to that kind of thing.

• (1305)

In a way, the bill before us reflects this government's problem in that it sends a double message: on the one hand, promote economic recovery, but oddly enough on the other hand, do it on the backs of the least fortunate in our society.

Ontario will not be affected as much as other provinces by this reform, with 30 people or so not meeting the new eligibility requirements. That gives some idea of the influence the Ontario caucus has over this government, but I hope members who represent other provinces will make sure they have their say and convince the government to show a little more compassion for regional economies which do not necessarily keep going year-round. In that sense, I think it is important for the government to act quickly.

I would have preferred to vote today on a bill setting up real job creation programs. This bill touches on several issues; in fact, we might even say that someone tried to smother the unemployment insurance issue in this great omnibus bill, but no one was fooled. We realize that the reform before the House today is the same reform the Conservatives introduced last year and which the Liberals have re-established and will continue to apply.

That reminds me of the question Premier Daniel Johnson of Quebec, still a true federalist, put to this government. He asked: "Look, who is in charge in Ottawa, the bureaucrats or the government?" That is what we have come to realize with this bill. The machinery of government kept working after October 25, and no one bothered to stop it. That is why these things are still going on.

When you live in the lovely Ottawa region, it is very easy to forget that some people are stuck with unemployment rates of 20 or 25 per cent and to conclude that UI beneficiaries are people who do not want to work. It is not true. If the unemployed were happy, they would not have the highest rates of suicide and prescription drug use. They would not have to put up with high crime rates and other social problems.

Some ridings and regions are more dependent on the economic situation; in those regions, we need new ways of coping with structural change. But this government lacks imagination and awareness and takes no action.

As a matter of fact, I am very happy to be part of the Official Opposition because it gives me the opportunity to speak for those who have no voice here. The two provinces most affected are Newfoundland and New Brunswick. Quebec, too, is hard hit. We have been taking the floor for three days in an attempt to convince members opposite to change their mind. Government members should be rising to demand that this bill or at least the clauses on unemployment insurance be withdrawn.

[English]

**Mr. Ray Speaker (Lethbridge):** Madam Speaker, I thank you very much for the opportunity to take part in the debate on Bill C-17.

What I want to do in these 10 minutes is summarize the arguments of my colleagues in the last three days of debate. We have looked at this omnibus legislation and in all omnibus legislation we have a difficult time in deciding whether we vote for it or against it because involved in that type of legislation are often some good ideas and often ideas that are partly acceptable and some that are not acceptable at all. That is the choice we have to make in the final analysis, whether in an overall sense there is enough on the pro side to move one to a position of a vote of yes rather than a vote of no.

That is the way the bill has been presented. The ruling of the Speaker was that is the way the debate will carry on and we intend to do that. We want to put the government on notice, however, that at committee stage and at report stage it is our intention to be very aggressive in some of the areas before us.

• (1310)

I would like to touch on each of the important principles in the bill.

First of all, with regard to public sector compensation, we support the government's freezing of salaries as it has at the present time and also the freezing of the increments. There may be some abnormal circumstances or anomalies arising during the next period of time and I hope the government will be considerate and compassionate. I hope it will be able to deal with any of the circumstances that may in an adverse way affect some employee in government who, in terms of their responsibility, may have a right to an increase or fair pay for the work that they present and the responsibilities that they take in the public service.

I think of the Government of New Brunswick, I think of the government of Alberta when an issue such as this arises and the government either freezes a salary or reduces it. I have heard this from government and I have heard people in the public sector say they are being treated unfairly, governments are trying to balance their budgets on the back of the public service. We have to assess that statement and look at the framework in which it is being made.