

Is that not the return of the steamroller style we first saw in the Trudeau years? Is not the present Liberal government acting as the servant of federal bureaucracy, which is systematically denounced by Canadians as a whole? Everybody in Canada, sovereignists as well as federalists, is fed up with the fact that the federal bureaucratic machine dictates how things should be done, and what Canadians and Quebecers should think. This is why the official opposition is perfectly justified in rising up against it.

When we know that there are 800,000 welfare recipients in Quebec and 1,200,000 in Ontario, it means that it is not only the fault of the government of Quebec, which has been in power for less than a year. When we see that there are 800,000 welfare recipients in Quebec and 1,200,000 in Ontario, does that show that the Canadian system is working? Are the interventions of the federal government producing good results? I believe the member has to recite an act of contrition and reconsider his position.

As I was saying at the beginning of my speech, my question will be on this subject.

• (1100)

In that case, what choice remains to Quebecers but to side with those who want change, those who really want Quebec to be the master of its development? We are talking about the Bloc Québécois, the Parti Québécois, and possibly the Action démocratique du Québec party, all of whom want Quebec to be in charge of its own development.

Should not the member for Saint-Léonard try to convince his government to reconsider its positions and to backtrack on this decentralization project which will only lead to more results like Canada's present debt, an absolutely negative result of the Canadian federal system?

Mr. Gagliano: Madam Speaker, I would like to tell the hon. member that I agree with him on one point only. I agree with him when he says that he represents change. The members opposite have changed their minds back and forth so many times that even the Premier of Quebec, their ally, said that he was getting a stiff neck. They are trying to get out of this situation but they cannot because they are already in too deep.

All the polls show that Quebecers want to stay within Canada. But the separatists—and they refuse to be called by their true name—want people to believe that after they separate from the rest of Canada, they will have a political and economic association and that things will not be much different than they are now.

The member could at least stay put and listen to what I have to say. The choice is his, but if he does not stay, it means that he does not care to hear the answers to his own questions.

Supply

If separation really is the way to go, if it would solve all of Quebec's economic and social problems as the member was saying, why then do they have to have this change of direction after months of reflection and say that they will have a political and economic association? Because they need a winning question.

They have to play with words, to get around the problem to try and confuse people with their separatist option. There are not four or five questions, there is only one: Do Quebecers want to separate from the rest of Canada, yes or no? A bit earlier, the member for Richmond—Wolfe who asked his fellow Quebecers to vote yes. Why should they do so? For more pie in the sky? Another stiff neck? That is the question.

Today, for example, the opposition is telling us that we want to impose national standards. The budget was very clear on that. It said that there had to be mutual consent. The bill was clear. Furthermore, to make sure that it was really clear, that it said what the Minister of Finance and the government meant, we proposed amendments to specify that there would be agreements and mutual consent. Mutual consent means that the two parties agree. This is what we will aim for in our negotiations with the provinces.

If, instead of always complaining that Canada does not work, those who are in favour of separation were ready to co-operate with the other provinces and the federal government, we could solve many problems. For example, last year, in July, a free trade agreement was signed. The separatists want free trade with the United States and Mexico, but they are against free trade within Canada.

We introduced a bill to implement the free trade agreement signed by the Prime Minister and all the provinces but again, they oppose it. They say that the federal government wants to overstep its jurisdiction. Again, we took precautions, we checked the legislation.

The other day, in this House, we announced that there would be clarifications. The federal government does not for one moment intend to usurp the provinces' powers. What do we want? We only want to make the Canadian federation work.

• (1105)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. secretary of state, but his time is up. I take the opportunity to remind you all that we should never mention the absence of an hon. member from his seat.

[English]

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words in this debate as once again the citizens of Canada are treated to this family squabble.