

Government Orders

If policies of the past do not work, perhaps it is time that we stopped them and developed a new framework with which we can all work toward a unified Canada. Canadians resent official bilingualism as it stands now.

I will close by relating an instance which occurred last October. The Commissioner of Official Languages, the language police, visited Jasper National Park to award park officials for their outstanding promotion of French language in the park. A closer examination of the demographics shows just how wasteful the commissioner's junket was. It is illogical to have bilingual services available in Jasper National Park or any other place where there is not sufficient demand.

• (1125)

Last year over 2.4 million people visited the park. The visitors to the campgrounds came from the following regions: Alberta, 35 per cent; British Columbia, 15 per cent; California, Ontario, Washington, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The origin of people visiting by country was: Canada, 60 per cent; United States, 20 per cent; Germany, 5 per cent; and then England and Switzerland.

Curiously enough, signs in the campgrounds are in French and English and most of the campground staff are required to be bilingual in both official languages. If anything, services should be offered in English and German according to the statistics. Of course that would be ludicrous because the majority of Germans visiting Canada speak English.

Common sense must dictate all government policies. It is time to end tired, old divisive and expensive policies which not only add to our debt but which create problems instead of solving them. The time to end those is now.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I will ignore the preceding incendiary remarks of my colleague. It is certainly not out of pleasure, but rather out of a sense of duty as an MP, that I rise today to debate Bill C-76, which concerns certain provisions of the budget tabled on February 27 and which implements some of the announced changes in transfers to the provinces.

In fact, this bill is nothing more than the bitter fruit of certain decisions in the latest federal budget. Bill C-76 clearly illustrates the federal government's conspiracy against the provinces. With this bill, the federal government intends literally to offload \$7 billion of its debt onto the provinces. To this end, it has already made a mockery of one of its three main programs of transfers to the provinces—the equalization program. Under this program, the provinces will receive \$8.87 billion this fiscal year.

The aim of the program is to redistribute wealth within Canada by transferring some of the income of the wealthier provinces to the poorer ones. Since 1982, however, the federal government has imposed a maximum on transfer payments to provinces under the equalization program, tying total payments to growth in Canada's nominal GNP. This capping was renewed in January 1994 for five years under Bill C-3. With this measure, the federal government, be it Liberal or Conservative, has deprived and continues to deprive the provinces of revenues they would normally be entitled to.

As Quebec is one of the provinces, along with the Atlantic provinces, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, receiving federal money through the equalization program, its public finances will suffer enormously as the result of this measure. In fact, Quebec's public finances are already suffering because of this measure. The situation is more difficult for Quebec, because, of all the provinces benefiting from this program, it benefits the least per capita.

By tying maximum total payments to growth in the nominal GNP, the federal government is changing the very nature of the equalization payments, which serve primarily to redistribute wealth among the provinces. There is more. Bill C-76, as announced in the last budget, also provides for the replacement, in 1996-97, of the two other provincial transfer programs—the Canada assistance plan, known as the CAP, and established programs financing—by a new program, the Canada social transfer.

So far, we might consider this combining of two programs into a single one, thus streamlining operations, simplifying structures and so on, to be good news. However, that is the end of the good news. Because, instead of maintaining or increasing the level of transfer payments to the provinces, Ottawa is preparing to cut \$2.5 billion in 1996-97 from the budget usually reserved for these payments.

• (1130)

The 1997-98 fiscal year will be even worse, because the federal government plans to cut transfers to the provinces by another \$4.5 billion. This is yet another face of the flexible federalism the government is always trying to sell us in this House.

The problem is that the only thing that the government has successfully decentralized is its deficit. Obviously, Quebec will not be spared in the federal government's deficit decentralization operation. In the 1996-97 fiscal year, Quebec's transfer payment will be cut by \$650 million, thanks to clause 48 of Bill C-76.

For the 1997-98 fiscal year, we are still unsure of how the federal government intends to determine by how much it will cut transfer payments to the provinces. If it decides to continue using the same formula, Quebec's transfer payment will be cut by \$1.2 billion.