

*The Address—Mr. Guilbault*

tell the people such naked truths, and yet we have done just that on several occasions. Not only do we talk, we also act.

We know—and the Minister of Finance said so during the debate on the Speech from the Throne—that over one billion dollars will be spent this year on projects aimed at reducing unemployment in Canada. In particular \$450 million will be allocated to direct job creation programs, and almost \$590 million on manpower retraining and mobility programs to help jobless workers solve their personal unemployment problems.

Moreover, the Minister of Finance has announced that an additional \$150 million will be spent on labour intensive projects in those areas in Canada where the unemployment rate is the highest. As I said earlier, we are acting and we are not afraid to face any problem no matter what.

I would like to raise another point which I think is worthy of mention. During this debate, we have been blamed for our attitude to national unity. Several hon. members stated over and over again that this federal government would become the champion of centralization and near dictatorship. I think this is a lot of hogwash. On the contrary, we are now in a situation where government expenses are more decentralized than ever before.

As we all know, the constitution has never been amended in great depth so that the areas of provincial and federal jurisdictions have not been clearly set out over the years. But in one respect those areas of jurisdiction have been changed insofar as there has been a decentralization of the power to spend money. I would just like to read from the speech Senator Lamontagne delivered at a meeting held at the University of Montreal on April 6 last, and I quote:

In 1870, direct federal expenditures for goods and services amounted to 52 per cent of total government expenditures—

—in Canada. That is of federal, provincial and municipal governments.

—in 1926, this figure was only 26 per cent. In 1950, it went back to 48 per cent and went down again to 25 per cent in 1975. We have therefore returned to practically the same situation as in 1926, which was the period of highest decentralization in Canada.

● (1502)

I am still quoting Senator Lamontagne:

However, in 1926, federal government subsidies to provinces and municipalities represented only around 3 per cent of their total expenditures. This proportion rose to 5 per cent in 1950 and to near 30 per cent in 1975. This trend has strengthened the movement of decentralization.

It can easily be understood from those figures that the federal government, we know, is increasingly yielding funds and spending powers to the provinces. I repeat, today's federal government spends only 25 per cent of all expenditures in Canada by the various governments put together. This tendency is becoming more marked.

Regarding the national unity issue, I would particularly like to answer a bitter attack made by the member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) against the government in which she tried to ridicule, in an untimely manner in my opinion, the suggestion of a national referendum made by the

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head of this government. *Hansard* for October 25, page 245, reports the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands as saying, and I quote:

It would appear that the government may hold a referendum on national unity, and I stress the word "may" because, true to form, the Prime Minister declines to give any details of his proposed referendum. He equivocates. The referendum may or may not be held; it may or may not be held nationally; it may or may not be held only in Quebec.

And I now skip some parts of her address to arrive at a point when she mentioned:

One has to ask oneself if this referendum-cum-plebiscite, or plebiscite-cum-referendum, is no more than a diversionary tactic designed to take the attention of the people of this country away from the government's inept handling of economic problems.

What I would like to have heard from the opposition regarding this project of a referendum is what they really think about it. No, sir, once again they will be very careful not to tell us where they stand. However, it seems to me that it is by now clear that the government of Canada and Parliament should have at their disposal an instrument which would enable us to consult Canadians on an issue as important as national unity if the need arose. Otherwise, we leave it to the Parti Québécois to decide on everything, and to hold its own referendum, which means we are waiving our right to do the same and ask Canadians for their opinions on this matter. Certainly Canadians, especially in English speaking provinces would be quite anxious to express their views when the Parti Québécois offers them not only sovereignty but also economic association. I think hon. members will all agree that if they want an economic association with the rest of Canada, they had better consult them beforehand. So I sincerely hope that instead of sneering at such a serious proposal as this members of the opposition parties will support this measure when it comes up for discussion in this House, as it may give this Parliament an essential bargaining power.

What basically irks the opposition parties most is that they cannot make up a responsible team behind a responsible leader. There are frequent feuds in that party. Our cabinet is proud to have within its ranks the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Horner), a highly competent member who left his party and joined us as he felt he would have a better opportunity to serve the Canadian people more efficiently.

Reference should also be made to the arrival of the hon. member for Hochelaga (Mr. Lavoie) who left the other side for obvious reasons and joined the Liberals. It is also interesting, as an example of the disagreements among hon. members on the other side, to mention the trouble the hon. member for Palliser (Mr. Schumacher) has been experiencing after being defeated in what appears to be a manipulated convention of his party. We should soon know more about this, because I am told the hon. member wants to expound his views and present his case at the forthcoming Progressive Conservative convention in the province of Quebec. It will be interesting to see the development of that matter which is nothing short of mysterious.