

Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act

there are only about one million residents. We know the reality of politics. It is the strength of your voice, the number of votes and the number of seats which count. This is the politics of education, health care, and deficit cutting. We are nervous that we will be among the first in the country, along with the Atlantic provinces, to feel the effects of Bill C-96.

I have a clear message from my constituents. They have clearly told me, as their representative, that it is my obligation to do what I can in the House of Commons to convince other Members that Bill C-96 will not serve well the region of northern Ontario or other poorer regions in the country. In the end, I think it will do a great disservice to all Canadians and the entire country.

Mr. Nunziata: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague why Conservative Members of Parliament are not speaking up on this matter. We have been debating this Bill since 11 a.m. today and not one single solitary Conservative Member of Parliament has risen either to speak or to ask a question. That leads one to seriously question whether Conservative Members of Parliament are properly speaking out for their constituents. It is obvious that Bill C-96 is indefensible. Otherwise, Conservative Members of Parliament would stand up. They are simply not responding to the legislation. They have not tried to justify it in any way. Would my hon. friend and colleague give us some insight on why Conservative Members have said nothing on this particular piece of legislation?

Mr. Penner: Mr. Speaker, of course I am unable to answer the Hon. Member's question. I do not know why no Members rise in their place to speak out.

Mr. Blackburn (Brant): Just guess.

Mr. Penner: He asked for some insight. I can say that at third reading of Bill C-96 we are seeing that the much flaunted parliamentary reform, through which Members of Parliament were supposed to be set free from the discipline of Whips, has fallen flat on its face. Where is the reform of Parliament? My hon. friend from Wetaskiwin, a private Member with conviction whom I quoted earlier, has said that the way to handle the deficit is not to fight with each other about who is going to deliver services. I know that that Member feels strongly about Bill C-96. He feels every bit as strongly as I do. I am not casting aspersions on my hon. friend. I am simply saying that the parliamentary reform which we thought was going to work and be so magnificent in allowing Members of Parliament to express what is really in their hearts and on their minds has failed. We thought we were going to have a new age in Canada. We thought that this Parliament, which is so out-dated and dominated by the executive branch of Government, was going to change. However, despite the work of the Hon. Member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath), I see no evidence at all in this debate on Bill C-96 that parliamentary reform is at work.

[Translation]

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, one wonders whether this debate on third reading of Bill C-69 is not an exercise in futility, since it is obvious the Government has decided to proceed with the Bill and impose major cutbacks on resource transfers to the provinces, in terms of taxation ability. They have decided to carry out these cutbacks in the face of all objections from the provinces and the Opposition parties.

Now why didn't the Opposition accept the Government's decisions and let this Bill proceed? Why didn't it go on to other legislation so that the Government could go on vacation at the end of the month, a vacation we all need?

Mr. Speaker, although the Conservative Members are not prepared to change their position on this Bill today, I think it is important to put the facts on the record. How could the Conservatives forget the promises they made during the last election campaign, since they are going to pay for the decisions involved in Bill C-96 in the next election?

However, Mr. Speaker, the immediate impact of this Bill will be felt by the provinces and their taxpayers, by the people who receive medical services and depend on post-secondary education. They will pay now, and they will pay more, year after year.

● (1540)

Mr. Speaker, the House will recall a statement by the Minister of Finance in which he said that to share the burden of expenditure cutbacks, he was going to force the provinces to contribute around \$2 billion annually by putting restrictions on transfer payments to the provinces during the next five years.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder how in 1982, the Hon. Member for Etobicoke Centre (Mr. Wilson), when he was Opposition critic, could criticize the decision by the then Liberal Government to eliminate income guarantees when he asked the then Minister of Finance, Mr. MacEachen, why the Minister was prepared to cut spending in two major sectors. He said in 1982 that the Liberal Minister was prepared to take the risk of major cuts in medical care and post-secondary education. He proposed that, instead of imposing these cut-backs on a unilateral basis and forcing the provinces to cut expenditures and services, the Minister must agree to the alternative solution which was to convene two or three national conferences on health and post-secondary education so as to enable everybody to set the national objectives of various Government levels and thus make joint decisions before imposing cut-backs in expenditures.

Mr. Speaker, that was our present Minister of Finance when he was in Opposition in 1982. This is the kind of thought the Government expressed in the policy and the promises of this Government during the 1984 election campaign. At the time the Conservatives were firmly committed to go back to the 1977 transfer payment funding formula. This means a formula