

*Government Orders*

demanded that all federal budgets, including UI funds, allocated to manpower programs be transferred to Quebec.

The Quebec government hastened to create the Quebec manpower development society or SQDM so that labour market partners could work together to manage all manpower development programs in Quebec.

Bill C-96 increases the federal presence and encroaches on provincial jurisdiction by allowing the federal government to approach organizations, municipalities and individuals directly, without going through an intermediary.

The bill gives the minister, among other things, greater powers to intervene in income security matters for children and seniors. This opens the door to the privatization and contracting-out of certain programs, including unemployment insurance and the Canada pension plan.

As spokesman on seniors' organizations for the official opposition in the House of Commons, I am outraged by the June 12 tabling of the document from the Department of Human Resources Development, which questions the universality of old age pensions.

On Thursday, October 26, my colleague, the hon. member for Mercier and official opposition critic on human resources development in the House of Commons, said this: "The old age pension plan, the guaranteed income supplement, the spouse's allowance, the pension income tax credit, and the age tax credit will be combined into a single assistance program. Seniors' eligibility for this program will be based on their income".

The hon. member for Mercier also had this to say about the reform: "It is not only the end of universality for the old age pension that is at stake. What this government wants is to base the amount of the pension cheque on family income. This will affect mostly women and threatens their financial independence. The planned reform would also affect those who already receive their pensions, despite what the Prime Minister of Canada had suggested".

It is obvious that the end of universality for old age pensions marks a significant setback for Canadian and Quebec society, for women, and for all those who have a right to expect a minimum of financial security in the future.

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Quebec also has the dubious honour of having the highest rate of poverty among seniors over 65 years old in all of Canada. This analysis was made by the senior citizens council. The old age security pension remains the main source of income for seniors, and elderly women in particular. I have spoken many times in this House to denounce the federal government's planned cuts to old age pension, especially those announced after the October 30 referendum in Quebec.

When we put questions to the HRD minister in the House, he laughs them off and always seems to have all the answers. To listen to him, you would think that he is graced with papal infallibility. On September 26, as the official opposition's critic for seniors' organizations, I asked Prime Minister of Canada if he could confirm for Quebecers and Canadians in general that his government's old age pension reform was actually ready but being put off until after the referendum so seniors would not know how extensive the cuts awaiting them were.

At the same time, I pointed out to the Prime Minister that his Minister of Foreign Affairs had clearly stated that the federal government would definitely not touch old age pensions, which is in total contradiction with his finance colleague's announcement, in his February budget, of an old age pension reform.

Of course, as expected, the federal government did not announce any cuts before the Quebec referendum. I must point out that the federal labour minister and minister responsible for the government's no campaign in the referendum also departed from the traditional federal Liberal line in reassuring a concerned lady by saying that the pension system would also be maintained under the Quebec sovereignty bill.

On September 21, I questioned the Minister of Finance about the review of the Canada pension plan, pointing out to him that it was obvious he and the HRD minister were waiting until after the referendum to let the axe fall on the old age pension program.

The Parti Quebecois made a firm commitment to maintain the old age pension program in a sovereign Quebec. In fact, clause 11 of the draft bill on Quebec's sovereignty states that pensions and supplements payable to the elderly shall continue to be paid by the Government of Quebec according to the same terms and conditions.

Unlike the federal government, Quebec will be able to fund this program through tax moneys recovered from Ottawa. It should be pointed out however that the old age security program is funded through taxes levied by the federal government in Quebec and across Canada. On the other hand, the Quebec pension plan, QPP for short, is funded through premiums paid by Quebec employers and workers. With the QPP, Quebec already has all the administrative structures needed to keep providing the old age pensions currently paid by Ottawa out of Quebec taxpayers' taxes when Quebec becomes sovereign, which should not be long in coming.

Bill C-96 is the federal government's way of interfering in and creating more overlap with provincial jurisdictions. Areas coming under the responsibility of the minister would include old age security programs, and the Bloc Quebecois cannot support such a bill.