

must therefore acknowledge that the federal government did not have the courage before the referendum to clearly and precisely inform Quebecers of what was really in store for them in connection with old age pensions, because it knew what an impact that knowledge could have had on the final outcome of the vote.

Jean-Robert Sansfaçon, an editorial writer for *Le Devoir*, saw the announcements of old age pension cuts by the Minister of Finance in more or less the same light as Mrs. Blackburn. In his editorial last February 28 he wrote as follows: "If Ottawa goes ahead with this, it will mean an end to universal old age pensions, which might end up being reserved only for households with modest incomes. This is a really new concept, one more closely related to social assistance than to a pension plan, and would encourage everyone to save money during their working years".

In another editorial on March 4 he wrote: "Although this was not in the least what was expected of it, the present Liberal government is preparing to axe the plan. As early as 1997, we will see the end of basic benefits for everyone regardless of income. The amount received will no longer be the same for everyone but will be calculated according to total household income. Instead of being the base of the retirement income pyramid as it was in the past, the old age pension will become a kind of welfare payment. This is more than a reform, it is more like a revolution".

Before the House adjourned for the scheduled parliamentary recess, my colleague for Mercier got hold of a document called *Serving Canada's Seniors*.

This document confirms the government's intentions of changing the old age pension into a plan reserved for only the poorest in our society. Page 5 of this document states: "The old age pension system, the guaranteed income supplement, the spouse's allowance and the senior citizens' tax credit will be combined into a single new program requiring an income test".

In short, all programs will be rolled into one, and pensions will be paid to seniors according to family income.

After she obtained this document, the member for Mercier asked the Minister of Human Resources Development how he could reconcile what was revealed in this document with the Prime Minister's statement that the best way to protect our social benefits was to vote no. With his now legendary arrogance, the minister replied that the document in question was a mere invention by the Bloc Quebecois.

I would like to inform the people of Canada and of Quebec officially that no one within the Bloc has time to waste in writing such a document. And let me particularly point out that, if it were really a document from the Bloc, it would have been available in both of this country's official languages, and not just English.

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If the minister sincerely believes that the Bloc authored this document, I must reach the conclusion that, on the one hand, he does not know what is going on in his own department, and on the other hand, it may be one of two things. Either he has not read the budget of his finance colleague, or he read it without understanding it, for the document *Serving Canada's Seniors* contains the income security program reform promised in the Minister of Finance's budget last February. I would add that I am amazed that the Minister of Human Resources Development would point the finger at our party, when it is the Bloc that has been trying to cast some light on the coming changes to the various programs relating to income security for Canada's and Quebec's seniors.

I would like to conclude with an invitation to the Minister of Human Resources Development to re-examine his old age pension strategy. To pay off the deficit at the expense of seniors, especially women, is an unacceptable decision. When there is a budget in excess of \$160 billion, one is entitled to think that all of our social benefits could be preserved, including old age pensions. The government must have the courage to make decisions that will enable all citizens to do their part to improve the collective well-being, and not make the least well off among us pay the price on their own.

• (1030)

[English]

Mr. Peter Thalheimer (Timmins—Chapleau, Lib.): Madam Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to speak on Bill C-96, which seeks to establish the legislative framework for the Department of Human Resources Development.

I have been amused throughout the course of the debate on this issue by the comments of some opposition members, which suggest either a misreading of the bill or an overactive imagination. For instance, some members of the official opposition claim to detect a sinister plot by the government to usurp areas of provincial responsibility. Indeed, some have even gone so far as to suggest that we might seek to sabotage existing educational, training, and manpower programs in the province of Quebec. This rather odd scenario was perhaps best articulated by one Bloc member who suggested that this legislation might be part of some hidden agenda by the government to demolish all the educational tools Quebec has developed.

Members of the third party seem equally confused. Many Reform members have expressed disappointment that the bill will not usher in the millennium and solve all the country's problems in one fell swoop. This would be a miracle were it to occur, since the bill from its inception was designed simply to take care of some legislative and administrative issues.