

Government Orders

answering questions asked during question period, is to pretend that everything is rosy. No reaction. Total silence. No problem. With time, people are saying, "Maybe the Bloc MPs will get fed up. Anyway, it is a temporary party only". They are aware that we are in existence for a limited time, but the time is a bit longer than planned, and we continue to keep our shoulders to the wheel, to be vigilant, tenacious, persevering, keeping on our toes, and it is our intention to remain that way. We will continue until the Quebec consensus concerning manpower is satisfied with the federal government's actions.

• (1305)

Mr. André Caron (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to join my fellow Bloc members in speaking to Bill C-96, an act to establish the Department of Human Resources Development and to amend and repeal certain related acts.

As my colleagues explained earlier, this is an important bill. Last week when we were debating the amendment of the hon. member for Mercier, government members said that the bill simply grouped certain components without introducing any new elements. They told us not to worry. They said that the federal government would keep up the good work in the provinces and municipalities for the benefit of Canadians, and that basically, there was very little to get upset about. They assumed that the referendum was partly to blame that it was nothing very serious.

I would like to point out that the opposition of the Bloc Québécois to this bill is fundamental. This bill goes to the very heart of a certain definition, a particular vision of Canadian federalism. First of all, the Department of Human Resources Development. As the hon. member for Lévis said earlier, this is a very important department. It is responsible for unemployment insurance, old age security, education and transfers to the provinces for social assistance, and it has a budget that is probably second only to the budget for servicing Canada's debt.

This department is a giant that is able to intervene in areas which it assumes are under its jurisdiction. It can intervene effectively because it has the resources. Over the years, the department has developed a mandate for intervention. Consider unemployment insurance, which required an amendment to the Canadian Constitution. Consider old age security, family allowances and federal assistance to the provinces for post-secondary education. Gradually, over the past 15, 20, 30 or 50 years, this department, or should I say its predecessor departments which it has now absorbed, have spearheaded a Canadian vision of social policy.

If we recall what happened when Canada was founded in 1867, simply put, there was a division of powers, as is normal under a federal system. The federal government had its powers and the provinces had theirs, and anyone who bothers to read the Constitution will see that areas with a more immediate impact on people, such as health, education, and social assistance, were a provincial responsibility, while foreign affairs, the economy,

the armed forces and other areas of a more financial or economic nature were the responsibility of the federal government.

As I just said, over the years we have seen the federal government increasingly invade the jurisdictions of the provinces. So much so that today, we are considering a bill that will provide a rationale for the federal government's presence in provincial jurisdictions. I realize some people will say this may be normal, that federalism has evolved and change is necessary, that certain problems must be dealt with and that this should be done by the level of government best equipped to do so.

• (1310)

This is a bit what the bill says. The Minister of Human Resources Development may, at his pleasure, intervene, according to clause 6, in: "—all matters over which Parliament has jurisdiction relating to the development of the human resources of Canada". Admittedly, this is very broad. The department may enter into agreements involving employment, encourage equality and promote social security. In the present context, members will agree that this is very broad indeed.

We in the Bloc feel that the department is using this bill to acquire legislative jurisdiction to define policy in areas of provincial jurisdiction. What is the effect of the federal government's approach? It could be dramatic, given that Quebec, Ontario and the other provinces also operate in these areas.

The Government of Quebec is involved in health, education, social and employment matters in these jurisdictions. It has defined its programs. It has set up departments. It has activities planned in these areas. We note, in the bill before us, that the federal government is giving itself the right to intervene in these areas.

Perhaps it wants to intervene with the best of intentions, but, in practical terms, two levels of government are operating in the same areas with programs that often compete with or overlap each other. My colleague mentioned there are currently more than 100 programs, either federal or provincial, aimed at meeting objectives in the social, educational or employment fields.

So we end up with two levels of government that, in a way, knock each other out of commission, not out of ill will, but because of the very nature of the political structure defining the programs and objectives. What we see in Quebec, what I have noticed in my riding, is that there were provincial policies, co-ordinated primarily by the SQDM, the Société québécoise de développement de la main-d'oeuvre, and there were federal policies from the employment centres and the Department of Human Resources Development.