

Government Orders

Who is going to be hurt? Who is the most often out of work? Young people fresh out of school are having a difficult time finding work. Single mothers, seasonal workers, people over 50, people my age who suddenly find themselves unemployed after 25 years in the same job and who do not know what else to do, these are the people who are going to be hurt by the minister's reform.

Beyond the tactful language of bureaucrats using such incomprehensible terms as adjustment programs and frequent beneficiaries, what we must read is that those who really need unemployment insurance, who depend on it, will from now on be virtually cut off from it; their benefits will be lower and they will get less coverage.

Women are another group which will get hurt. We all know how hard they had to fight and must still do to reach a minimum of financial independence, since you cannot have equal opportunities without financial independence. What do we find in the minister's reform? He will tell us that it is only an idea, a strange idea for sure; as a matter of fact, he wonders why it is even in there. It could not be his doing, it must come from one of his officials.

People will reject it, but we know full well that things have already been decided. If a woman loses her job, her husband's income is taken into account to determine whether or not she qualifies for UI. As we know, men usually earn more than their spouses. Women who lose their jobs are treated as second class citizens, they will be penalized for having a husband who makes money. They will receive either no UI benefits or significantly lower ones.

This is a clear case of discrimination. I believe that if this was to be challenged in the Supreme Court under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, it would be ruled unconstitutional. Then there are the students. The minister went after them with a vengeance. He must really hate them to treat them the way he does in his reform. Let us look at Quebec. The situation is even worse in the rest of Canada. They are talking about cuts in federal transfer payments to the provinces for post-secondary education to the tune of \$2,600,000,000. Due to a complicated formula, that means that Quebec will get \$300 million less; bear in mind that it is a lot worse in other parts of the country.

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But for Quebec, \$300 million means quite a shortfall for post-secondary education programs. The minister himself admits, with rare candour, that these cuts will probably lead to higher tuition fees. According to some quick forecast, they will

probably double. If Quebec gets \$300 million less for post-secondary education, the government and universities will have to double, some say even triple, tuition fees. And it will be worse in the rest of the country. If Canadian students think things are tough now, wait until they see what this reform means for them.

The Minister has recognized that it will create somewhat of a problem. That is obvious. For example, tuition fees at Laval University in Quebec city are now \$3,000 and will easily rise to \$8,000 with this reform and the impact will be disastrous for students. The Minister says they will find a solution, they will lend money and implement a grants and loans program so that we can help students who will have to put up with the increased tuition fees. What does this mean?

It means, for example, that under post-reform conditions, a student going through law school, as I did, will leave the university owing the government approximately \$25,000. And that will be one debt among others because the student will have to borrow elsewhere to buy a car or for other reasons. For a Ph.D., the debt load will easily reach \$50,000.

It means this reform reopens the whole issue of accessibility to higher education for students who are not wealthy. In Quebec, we have been fighting for equal access for twenty years now. I know it is the same in the rest of Canada. For twenty years, people have been fighting for a system ensuring equal access to higher education. There was a time in Quebec when only the chosen few could attend university or obtain a Bachelor of Arts degree. Only those lucky enough to be born in a rich family had access to that. The others did not study, there were no schools for them. Only wealthy families could send their children to university. Twenty years ago, we changed all that. We fought a social battle and we invested considerable funds. That is one thing we are proud of, it is one of the great achievements of Quebec and the federal reform proposed by the Minister will bring us right back to the starting line. Only rich people, sons and daughters of wealthy families, will have the opportunity to attend university if a program such as this one is implemented.

What is even worse, what adds insult to injury is that Bill C-28 dealing with the Student Loans Program, a bill we fought against vigorously, a bill the Bloc Quebecois denounced, but one that was adopted in spite of everything because we had a majority against us in this House. Bill C-28 extends the implementation of the standards the federal government can impose upon provinces wishing to withdraw from that Student Loans Program. From now on, a province withdrawing from the program must implement a new program in all points similar to the federal program. In other words, because Bill C-28 was adopted, on top of restricting access to higher education, this reform will give the federal government the power to determine who will study and what they will study in each of the provinces, including Quebec. The federal government will be in a position to dictate standards and design curricula by controlling those who want to study.