

Government Orders

This is what we intend to do and therefore we will respect, as we always have, the will of the people of Canada and, in particular, of Quebec. This is why we continue to offer good government to Canadians—those who live in Quebec and those who live elsewhere, of course.

• (1200)

A few days ago, on November 20, 1995, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, said: "I draw the attention of the official opposition to recent post referendum polls, which state that 61 per cent of Quebecers want to remain in Canada and 78 per cent of Quebecers want to see major changes to the way the Canadian federation works". People want functional changes while remaining in Canada. That is what Quebecers want and we, of course, intend to respect that.

Today, we have before us a bill whose purpose is not to centralize but to consolidate into one department the work being done by different federal departments in order to improve government operations and to cut costs. "It is through bills such as this that hopefully through provincial federal co-operation we can get more people to work", said the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

On November 9, the Minister of Human Resources Development clearly addressed one of the essential impacts of this bill. He said and I quote: "— one of the direct results of the department will be to give far more space for provincial governments to begin to make decisions at their level of responsibility and jurisdiction. The time has come for us to take a much closer look at the respective roles and to build bridges to bring us together". That is what the minister said.

The opposition saw or pretended to see in Bill C-96 a move by the federal government to take over new powers. According to them, it is an intrusion in a provincial jurisdiction. In fact, the member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve spoke to it earlier, and I know he is listening carefully.

The reality is quite different. For instance, one must examine the exact wording of clause 6 of the bill, which is in fact a restrictive clause. It sets limits to the powers vested in the minister by the bill. It clearly says that the only issues concerned are those under the jurisdiction of Parliament. Again, the only issues concerned are those under the jurisdiction of this Parliament, period.

This clause applies to everything under the authority of the Department of Human Resources Development. Any existing statutory power will remain exactly the same after this bill is passed. I repeat for the member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, the same.

There is definitely no intrusion on areas of provincial jurisdiction: the bill forbids that. It is crystal clear. That being said, I

am sure—maybe not sure, but I hope—that the Bloc members will change their mind and vote for the bill. I already see in the eyes of some of them that they are tempted to change their mind and suddenly vote for such a good bill.

Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when I hear the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell telling us that it is crystal clear and explaining things at great length, with a certain sense of humour, I feel that, after all, the problem might lie in the very objective way he is looking at the situation, a liberal and objective way, I might add.

I will use the next few minutes to explain to my "objective" colleague a number of facts which might help him understand our huge reservations—I am quite sure that he is listening very carefully to my remarks and that he will take them into serious consideration.

Instead of being part of the solution, Bill C-96 makes the problem worse.

• (1205)

Indeed, far from heralding the withdrawal of the federal government from manpower training, Bill C-96 reinforces the federal presence in this area. Duplications and inefficiencies resulting from this bill will grant the minister new powers, whether the objective member opposite likes it or not, new powers to negotiate directly with local governments or agencies, bypassing the provinces, which will enable him to set directions, standards and outcomes unilaterally.

The honourable government whip told us that clause 6 did not provide for new powers and that it defined and restricted them. Well then, let us have a look at clause 6. It reads:

The powers, duties and functions of the minister extend to and include all matters over which Parliament has jurisdiction—

Tell me, Mr. Speaker, is there any matter over which Parliament does not have jurisdiction, and which would not come under the laws of the land? Whatever goes on from sea to sea is regulated by this country's legislation and, consequently, is a matter over which Parliament has jurisdiction one way or another.

Not only are they not restricted, but they are incredibly increased. In fact, the powers, duties and functions of the minister are quite broad. Moreover, contrary to the present legislation, they are not specified, and we know that the federal government has a habit of intruding on matters of provincial jurisdiction. Therefore, there is cause for concern when you see the numerous jurisdictions of Parliament.

Let me quote the description of Human Resources Development Canada which is found in the Budget Plan tabled on February 27, 1995. It says: "Human Resources Development Canada administers unemployment insurance, income security programs for children and the elderly, the current federal