

Government Orders

I wish this government would have the courage to bring the whole issue of employment equity and reverse discrimination into this House for a full and free debate. Despite the deep flaws in this bill, and I have talked about a few of them, we are going to support it, not because we particularly like some of the things I have talked about but because income contingent repayments are a part of this, albeit in a small way. They do provide a glimmer of light and a glimmer of hope for some Canadians.

I hope, however, that in drafting future legislation the government will listen closely to what some of the speakers from our party have said about this. Consider very carefully whether or not what they are proposing, particularly with this reverse discrimination, really is part of a free, fair and just society.

I hope the government listens very closely to some of the suggestions we have made with respect to the voucher system, pursues this and is prepared to sit down and talk with our party. We really do feel it would bring more students into the system, making the universities more accountable. I know the members across the way would be very much in favour of that.

I think we could sit down, talk about that and have a great discussion. At the end of the day, despite the flaws, it is our intention to support this legislation.

[Translation]

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis): Madam Speaker, as the Official Opposition critic for training and youth, I have the pleasure to speak once more on Bill C-28 respecting federal financial assistance to students. It is getting late, and we are all a little bit tired. This is the end of a rather special day, since we reviewed two bills regarding young people: this one on financial assistance to students and earlier, Bill C-37 concerning young offenders.

The opposition presented three amendments, and this is my fifth speech on the issue of young people. In the present case, it is good to remember that Bill C-28 is part of the youth employment and learning strategy announced on April 15 last by the Minister of Human Resources Development.

I had immediately denounced this strategy as, in my opinion and the opinion of the Official Opposition, it was an even greater infringement in the field of education which, it bears to be repeated once again, is an exclusive provincial jurisdiction under the Canadian Constitution. Let us also remind the House that this move flies in the face of Quebec's fundamental interests since there is a wide consensus among Quebecers to the effect that education is the main tool for developing and promoting our identity as Quebecers.

The changes to the student loan and grant system are only a few of the social program reforms about which the Minister of Human Resources Development has supposedly started to consult Canadians and Quebecers.

• (2255)

This week, the provincial ministers of social services warned the federal government that it should not ignore them when preparing this reform. Also, last week we learned that the details of this reform would be made public only during the summer when the House will not be sitting. Why is the Minister of Human Resources Development in such a hurry to change financial assistance to students when this reform has not yet begun? This means that they consider young people, students, as a separate group and feel it is not necessary to complete the review of social programs, in which the population was invited to participate by the minister himself. To reach the minister's objective, that is, to raise the loan ceiling from \$2,500 to \$4,000, all that was needed was to amend the existing legislation; the students would have received their increased loans for the next academic year, and the Official Opposition would not have opposed such a measure.

After the reflection, after the consultation, after the reform, with the complete picture in mind, the minister could then have passed a new legislation to complete the process and integrate the young to the rest of the population.

If you read between the lines, it is easy to conclude that the minister will, from now on, ignore provincial jurisdictions and, among other things, impose national standards for education. Worse yet, they even hint at the possibility of finally having a federal department of education. The most important question to ask when studying this bill is why does the government want to modify financial assistance to students. The first answer is there is only \$1 million in the current budget for that. Why then pass a new legislation which will modify considerably the management, the administration of financial assistance to students just to distribute \$1 million this year?

In our view, this is just smoke and mirrors. The real reason is that Bill C-28 gives more power to the Minister of Human Resources Development. That is the main purpose of this bill, particularly with regard to appropriate authorities. The bill says that the minister may designate for a province an appropriate authority, which authority may in turn designate as designated educational institutions any institution of learning, in Canada or outside Canada, offering courses at a post-secondary school level. It is also the appropriate authority which will issue certificates of eligibility to students. There are two conditions to fulfil in order to get a certificate. First, the student should be in need of financial assistance, that is quite obvious. Second, he or she must have attained satisfactory scholastic standards. This aspect, which normally comes under the jurisdiction of the provinces and the educational institutions, will now be subject, through regulations, to verification by the minister who will satisfy himself that satisfactory standards were attained before issuing a certificate of eligibility.