

Government Orders

Bill C-96 completely, because it already has rejected our amendment which would have given the provinces an opting out option.

Since that they have rejected the amendment, the only other solution is to withdraw the bill itself so that we can clarify the situation and so that Quebec can have sole jurisdiction in the area of manpower training and take all the necessary measures to face the challenges of our changing society.

Given the arguments presented, I hope the government will have the decency to withdraw this bill.

[English]

Mrs. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on Tuesday we dealt with the amendment proposed by the member for Mercier, a motion that had nothing to do with Bill C-96. Now perhaps we can move forward.

As I look back over the various statements by members on this bill, it seems to me there are really two basic questions we have to answer. First, does Bill C-96 represent any change in statutory powers that would allow the federal government to interfere with the provinces? Second, is the department created by Bill C-96 the kind of department we want, a department that will provide the best possible service and the right kind of service to Canadians?

We can deal with the first question very quickly. It has been answered clearly by the Minister of Human Resources Development and it is answered clearly by the bill itself. There are no substantive changes to existing statutory powers. The bill itself in clause 6 limits the powers of the minister to matters under the jurisdiction of Parliament, so there can be no intrusion on provincial areas of responsibility.

That really is the end of the discussion. Some people may say otherwise. They may say the bill is a secret plot to invade provincial territory, but saying it is so does not make it so, no matter how many times you say it. In the end we have to base any conclusions on what is really in the bill in black and white, not what is in other people's imagination. What is there in black and white is very clear: There is no interference with the provinces, possible or intended, in Bill C-96.

The second question deserves more comment. Is this the kind of department we want to create?

Fundamentally, this bill draws together all the different elements, programs and policies of the federal government related to human resources development into one integrated, coherent system. It is the basis for a new approach to helping Canadians as they deal with some of the incredible changes in the workplace and in the economy. It also provides a basis for new relationships between the federal government and individual Canadians, between different levels of government, between

governments and local communities. As the Minister of Human Resources Development said when he moved second reading:

This is not a defence of the status quo or what it used to be. It is an attempt to provide a new, innovative way of governing. The old ways are simply not relevant to the kinds of conditions we now face. That is one reason the government has undertaken to provide a new set of instruments, brought together with a single focus on policy.

The minister went on to say that the single focus was there so we can tackle the real deficit problem, which is not just the fiscal deficit, but the human deficit, a deficit as corrosive and undermining to the well-being of individuals as anything we face on the fiscal side.

How can this new department help tackle the problems we have with the human deficit? I say it is by providing a single focal point in the communities across the country, drawing together all the resources of the federal government and the community to help people find and keep jobs. It is by providing the opportunity for working more closely with the provinces to draw all of this country's resources together to help people find jobs. This is the priority of this government. It is the number one priority for Canadians. We know that.

Throughout this debate we have heard many examples of how this approach is already working. We have heard how the department is building a new integrated, decentralized service network moving from 450 to 750 points of service reaching smaller communities 24 hours a day. It is providing four times as many offices where seniors can get service in person. It is using the best technology available to speed up service, cutting UI processing time by two days, cutting old age security processing claims from eight days to one-half day.

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We have heard how major changes have made student loans more accessible, flexible and sustainable. This has helped more than 300,000 students this year alone and has provided special grants to more than 13,000 high need students. We have heard how our new youth internships are leading to real jobs for some 24,000 young Canadians and how 130 Youth Service Canada projects across the country are helping young people serve their communities while getting valuable work experience. We know this is essential.

We have heard how the department is building new stronger partnerships with the private sector. There is increased funding for sector councils, partnerships where every federal dollar generates an additional \$1.50 from industry to help Canadians adjust to the new economy, and we all have to realize it is here.

We have heard how the federal government is developing new partnerships with the provinces through joint federal-provincial initiatives. This is helping some 60,000 single mothers, older workers, aboriginals and young people to get new skills and new jobs.