

Government Orders

power to put an end to the duplication and unnecessary expenditure in this sector.

We hear the same message from Gérald Ponton of the Association des manufacturiers du Québec. In the days that followed the referendum, he said it was absolutely vital that one level of government withdraw, if manpower practices were to be effective. For this to work in Quebec, it is the federal government that will have to withdraw. We must not forget that the whole matter of training is part of government activity, it does not simply come out of thin air.

As Quebec is already responsible for the labour code, which covers the vast majority of Quebec workers, for occupational health and safety, for minimum labour standards and for all regulations on professional qualifications, professional conduct and mass layoffs, giving Quebec responsibility for the entire area of training is like giving it an extra piece of equipment in its tool box. The Government of Quebec already has the networks, like the education network, for it to get involved in occupational training, among other areas, in order to ensure that young people coming along and workers needing retraining receive what they need efficiently and appropriately.

The auditor general, in his latest report, concluded that employee training costs were highest in Quebec in terms of the money spent by the federal government.

• (1100)

This is further proof, with the numbers to support it, that the federal government should withdraw from this sector.

But, instead, it forges ahead with Bill C-96; it insists on interfering everywhere, and on signing agreements with municipal governments, various agencies, and even the provinces. But nowhere does it say that these agreements will be in keeping with the provinces' policies.

In a way, this is the continuation of the monolithic state, and this is the terrible insult to Quebec federalists who want to see the Canadian Constitution and the Canadian structure revamped so that the federal government assumes only those responsibilities which come under its jurisdiction and which would be acceptable to federalists.

I also believe that this is the proof that, after all, sovereignists are right. Even with the warning it was served on October 30, the government is unable to shift gears and proceed with the adjustments that would allow it to meet Quebecers' aspirations; the only way for Quebec to have the tools it needs will be for the province to hold another referendum and separate.

What could be said to get the government to reverse its decision to pass this bill? What could make the government withdraw from this sector? I believe it would take two condi-

tions which will be easily attainable. First, the federal government must stop using the unemployment insurance fund as a cash cow; now that it can no longer borrow money abroad, it has discovered a domestic market, namely employee and employer UI contributions. As a result, this year, in 1995-1996, it has accumulated a five billion dollar surplus, while it cut the number of weeks during which beneficiaries are entitled to UI benefits and increased the number of weeks of work required to qualify for UI. It has some nerve.

This is quite a message for the workers of Quebec and Canada, especially seasonal workers; it says that in order to be able to encroach on a field of exclusive provincial jurisdiction, the federal government is going to squeeze money out of those who need it the most. Let us take a worker in peat production, forestry or agriculture in general; because of those measures, instead of becoming entitled to unemployment benefits after 12, 13 or 14 weeks and receiving them for the rest of the year if his job is to continue the following year, the worker will have to find work for 14 or 15 weeks; otherwise, he will not be able to fulfil the requirements and receive a full year's income from either work or unemployment.

We know that unemployment insurance is not financed by the government, but exclusively by employer and employee contributions. Let us try to transpose this situation into another type of insurance program. You pay premiums, but you have no control whatsoever over the contract which determines how you will obtain insurance benefits; the decision is entirely up to the government. Instead of being eligible for benefits for 30 or 35 weeks, you will receive them for 25 or 30 weeks only, and there will be a four or five-week waiting period during which you will have to go on welfare. That is what is happening in Quebec this year. Between September 1994 and September 1995, the number of welfare recipients increased by 20,000 because of changes made by the federal government and now they are announcing, for next week, a new reform which will raise eligibility requirements yet again.

This also sends a message to federalists who believe there can be a difference between Canada and the United States. This government keeps trying to copy the American model, but the expected result will never be achieved. Canadians, particularly those of the Maritimes and Eastern Quebec and all those who really want more balance in our society and an adequate distribution of wealth and expenses, will have to stand up and say: "No; we will no longer accept that kind of action on the part of the government. It will have to restrain its activities to its own constitutional jurisdiction and withdraw once and for all from such areas as manpower training."

• (1105)

That is why I think the government should listen to the provinces, take note of the consensus in Quebec and withdraw