

Government Orders

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Madam Speaker, let me first start by saying that our worst nightmare has come true. What we feared when we embarked upon the last referendum campaign was that the central government would disregard one of the most solid consensus we have ever seen in the province of Quebec.

This most solid and deep-rooted consensus is that we will never be able to do anything about the employment situation if we do not give the levers required to deal with labour market-related problems to the level of government most capable of doing so.

Right now, the best government to give Quebec a labour market policy to efficiently fight unemployment is not the central government, but rather the National Assembly of Quebec.

Why are we saying that it is not the central government? Because the central government has to make decisions about a labour market that covers five regions, and we know that the labour market situation in New Brunswick is nothing like the situation in Quebec.

This is why several, if not all, of the major stakeholders on the Quebec labour market are opposed to Bill C-96.

• (1145)

Let me remind the House of some of the organizations that are against Bill C-96. There is the Société québécoise de développement de la main-d'oeuvre, the Institut canadien de l'éducation des adultes, the FTQ, the CLC, and despite this coalition of organizations representing tens of thousands of citizens, the central government has the nerve, the gall to introduce in this House a bill that would allow the federal to interfere in an area without any mandate to do so.

I hope that the government whip and his team will finally come to their senses and realize that they are doing something irreparable by submitting Bill C-96.

Yet, when you think about it it is obvious that everything which concerns the labour market comes under provincial jurisdiction. Surely, no member of this House is unaware that the labour code, the CSST, orders respecting collective agreements and mass layoffs are areas of provincial jurisdiction and that it is perfectly natural that labour market-related policies are the specific and exclusive business of the provinces.

Let me remind the House of a fact: unemployment is not innate. One is not born unemployed. Unemployment has nothing to do with genetics. Nor has it anything to do with the language one speaks. A person's language does not bear on his or her working skills. How is it, then, that within the federation the unemployment rate has always been higher in Quebec than in Ontario? Workers in both provinces have about the same qualifications and live in about the same social and economic environment. How is it that for the last 20 or 25 years Quebec has had a

higher rate of unemployment than Ontario? And I am sure we could give very concrete examples of countries where unemployment was successfully eliminated. They have what is called a frictional unemployment rate of about 3 or 4 per cent, reflecting the number of people who quit their job for a very particular reason and are looking for another one.

How is it that we are unable in our system to create conditions allowing all those who want to work to find a job? Naturally, there are those who cannot work because they are handicapped and those who are momentarily out of work and those who do not want to work. But how is it that, in 1995, qualified and competent people who truly want to work find themselves in a system where the government is unable to create conditions leading to their employment? You do not have to be a rocket scientist or have three doctorates to understand that, if unemployment is not a matter of heredity or of language, there must be political reasons to explain why the unemployment rate is at 11, 12 or 13 per cent.

These political reasons are very clear: we have two governments which impede each other's labour market initiatives. The best example of this inefficiency, my colleague the member for Trois-Rivières referred to it, is of course the existence of two manpower centre networks, which cancel each other's initiatives.

Let me just remind you that Ottawa administers just as many programs as Quebec does. Quebec has approximately 25 programs to put people back to work and so does Ottawa. What this means is that if the people that we, as members, meet in our constituency office, and I am sure that this happens to you too, are UI recipients, they are eligible for some programs, but if they receive income security benefits, they are eligible for some programs but not for others.

• (1150)

I believe we are mature and lucid enough as parliamentarians to say that we must aim at having only one government that will control all powers and levers in order to help put people back to work, and take them out of that unacceptable situation called unemployment.

This decision, this wish, is incompatible with the existence of two governments and it is certainly incompatible with the fact that two governments can each have 25 programs without any coordination between them. Instead of proposing what all important stakeholders in Quebec are asking, that is that the federal government pull out of the labour sector, this government has the nerve, the irresponsibility and the irreverence to give us a bill, Bill C-96, which increases the powers of the minister in labour matters.

Can you imagine such a situation where all Quebec stakeholders are asking for one thing, and the Government of Quebec is incoherently saying the exact opposite? We must not forget that the social cost of unemployment has been evaluated and I am