

Supply

The other explanation, perhaps a more plausible one, is that allmighty, all-rational, all-giving politics were involved, where the Prime Minister might have let it be known that common sense and interest ought to prevail, including the self-interest of the member for Saint-Maurice, to ensure that the residents of his riding, with all logic, all rationality thrown to the winds, would reap the benefit of the creation of this new centre instead of the region of Trois-Rivières, the city of Trois-Rivières ever being where workers are merely shuffled around without a job created. In fact, if my memory serves me right, there was more than shuffling, there were cuts, with 58 positions lost due to office closures.

Whether technocracy or politics were involved, the decision is indisputably illogical and arbitrary. As I have said, it contradicts the parameters the department has set for itself with respect to creating these regional centres. The parliamentary secretary will agree there was some kind of rationale. It is never easy to make these decisions, and that is why you need certain criteria.

The main criteria when making these decisions include the population affected, the number of unemployment insurance recipients affected, the number of welfare recipients and the number of businesses and employers likely to hire people on unemployment insurance and welfare.

In each case, Trois-Rivières represents more or less twice the activity, population, number of employers and number of unemployment and welfare recipients. That is why Trois-Rivières is the regional capital. It is the largest urban area and the most important one in terms of economic activity and population in the whole region. That is why it made good sense to have and keep this kind of service in Trois-Rivières.

The department, for reasons that remain obscure, decided to locate the service in Shawinigan. The decision was not only arbitrary and illogical but also very unpopular. Since September, a petition has been circulating, signed by more than 25,000 people, condemning this decision by the federal government. Seventy agencies took the trouble to draft resolutions condemning this decision, including 40 municipalities as well as community agencies.

• (1620)

This case has attracted the support of the Fédération des caisses populaires and the Fédération de l'âge d'or, because the elderly become anxious when they see changes coming and the regional federation got involved as well.

We are seeing a chorus of protests in the riding of Trois-Rivières and in the region, including Cap-de-la-Madeleine, a riding represented by my colleague from Champlain, Trois-Rivières-Ouest, in my riding, and even on the other side of the

river, in Bécancour, which historically has always done business with Trois-Rivières because of its location.

So this illogical and unpopular decision will have certain practical consequences. This is not about protest for protest sake. The fact is that, under the new system, the paperwork will be done by the regional management centre in Shawinigan. People will register in Trois-Rivières, where the facts will be noted, without further processing. And any action subsequent to registration with the manpower centre, on three out of four files requiring additional processing, according to our statistics, will be taken from Shawinigan instead of being processed in Trois-Rivières as is now the case.

The minister claims it will make no difference and will not in any way change the quality of the services now enjoyed by the people of Trois-Rivières and surrounding area. Nevertheless, we should realize that departmental investigations following registration and all appeals to the UI board of referees, for instance, will from now on, according to our information, be done in Shawinigan instead of Trois-Rivières.

Do not tell us there will be no drop in the quality of service for the Trois-Rivières area. That is just not true.

This decision is arbitrary, illogical, technocratic and political, and above all, it was made without any consultation with regional partners.

As I said before, the government has three alternatives, one being the status quo, leaving things unchanged in Trois-Rivières and setting up a centre in Shawinigan for the northern Saint-Maurice area, but the government should not establish a regional management centre in Shawinigan for the whole region, as it is about to do.

[English]

Mr. Alex Shepherd (Durham, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I listened to the member's comments about this bill I became very confused. He started off criticizing the federal government's spending power, presumably under the whole aspect of manpower training. Basically what has been asked for is the federal government not use that power in such a way that it would create duplication and overlap within provincial jurisdictions.

I hear the federal government has consented to that and has basically said it will not use its spending powers. However, they want the government to do both. They want the government to give them the money in addition to curbing its powers. The reality is they want to have their cake and eat it too.

Worse than that, the hon. member went on to give us a dissertation from the national assembly in Quebec City which would, as I understand it, basically say we should have no presence there whatsoever. The member continued to argue why we should have a placement centre in his riding of Trois-Rivières. It would be more consistent if he argued there should be no placement facilities either in Shawinigan or his own riding.