

Government Orders

Whatever the Prime Minister says, we did read this bill, and it was easy for us to grasp its real intent. For example, clauses 6, 20 and 21 are unequivocal.

Clause 6 aims at extending federal jurisdiction by expanding the powers, duties and functions of the Minister. Clause 20 provides that the Minister may negotiate and enter into agreements with, and I quote: "such other persons or bodies as the Minister considers appropriate".

In the same vein, clause 21 reiterates that the minister may authorize any other person or body to exercise any power or perform any duty or function of the minister.

All that to make sure we understand that the minister has no obligation to consult or agree with the provinces in precise areas of provincial jurisdiction.

Indeed, from now on, according to Bill C-96, the department of Human Resources Development will be authorized to by-pass the provinces and impose manpower standards and policies. It will be able to develop a parallel federal structure to intervene on the Quebec labour market.

The federal government is empowering itself to by-pass the provinces and to intervene directly with bodies, municipal governments and individuals. While the Constitution gives provinces power over manpower development and vocational training, the federal government has chosen to ignore it.

So history repeats itself. It will be remembered that, in 1991, the previous Conservative government tried to encroach upon provincial jurisdiction and directly interfere in matters regarding vocational training and manpower. Once again, Quebec unanimously denounced these centralizing and unconstitutional moves by the federal government.

The Quebec Liberal Party and the Conseil du patronat du Québec added their voices to this denunciation. The same centralizing designs, which are spelled out in Bill C-96, are now giving rise to the same denunciations everywhere in Quebec. The initiative is, however, more subtle this time, because it comes a few days after the referendum.

• (1240)

While the Liberals spoke of nothing but change during the referendum campaign, they are now, with Bill C-96, attempting further intrusion in the area of training.

Canadian provinces have different labour markets. A centralized and uniform approach would hardly help anyone. The result would be more red tape, as my colleague for Joliette clearly demonstrated earlier.

Let us not forget that Quebec already has established manpower networks. The Société québécoise de développement de la main-d'oeuvre is a special form of partnership involving all

Quebec stakeholders in manpower matters, whether they are employers, unions, co-operatives, educators or community groups. Quebecers know better than anyone else what is good for them. Quebecers must decide what their manpower policies should be and set their own priorities.

This is not a symbolic demand or the confirmation of a historic right. It is only a matter of good old common sense for those who take to heart the promotion and the support of manpower development. If there really is a will to change and to decentralize in Canada, as we were told during the referendum campaign, this is the time for the winds to blow.

If Bill C-96 is a proof of the flexibility the Liberal government boasts about, if it is indicative of the rejection of, and I quote the minister of Human Resources Development, "the old top down centralized hierarchies of governmental organization, which have been really a product of the old industrial age", then, it is a total failure.

Bill C-96 sends a clear message to the Quebec Liberal Party, to the Conseil du patronat and to all other partners in the field of employment in Quebec, and it is that the federal government will never accept that Quebec assume sole responsibility for manpower training within its territory. Ottawa will never accept either that Quebec repatriate the funds that the federal government allocates to manpower training programs. Quebecers will clearly see that it is impossible to develop a Quebec manpower policy suited to its realities and administered by Quebec if they stay in Canada. That will only be possible in a sovereign Quebec.

Therefore, I urge all members of Parliament who really care for the improvement of relations between the two founding peoples of this country to support the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Mercier and to vote against Bill C-96.

Mr. Patrick Gagnon (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the bill has nothing to do with jurisdictions. It has everything to do with people. It is aimed at helping Canadians and, of course, Quebecers in remote areas to find jobs.

The bill is designed to allow young people, older workers, single mothers and low income individuals to acquire the skills they need in our ever-changing economy. It is also aimed at bringing communities, businesses and all levels of government together to look at the human aspect of regional economic development.

This means that other forms of agreements and partnerships between the federal government and the provinces are possible. Quebec talked a lot about partnership during the referendum campaign and we are willing to go in this direction. As a matter of fact, partnerships with local and regional economic develop-