

*Supply*

years now, we have been saying among other things that adequate consulting services should be made available to the unemployed. Psychologists and other manpower counsellors working with the unemployed should be in a position to do so.

As a result of the federal government's decision, there will not be one single employee left in smaller urban centres, only automated tellers. In medium sized centres, much fewer people will be assigned to and available to provide services to the unemployed, the service users.

The minister is currently considering suggestions made by bureaucrats, public servants. It may be useful at this time to remind him that, before moving to implement this reform, the main effect of which will be to reduce personal contact between people on UI and those who can help them, perhaps other options should be considered.

• (1710)

Let me give you concrete examples. At the La Pocatière employment centre, in my riding, one of the most performing centres in Canada in terms of service requests processing speed, it had become the custom to automatically refer anyone filling an unemployment insurance claim to a counsellor. This prevented claimants from getting lost in the system or getting inadequate advice.

As a result of this measure, the staff will be cut by 17.6. I am not crazy about referring to people in terms of decimals; therefore, let us say about 18 people. After all the cuts are implemented, only 13 people will be left.

It is impossible to both reduce the number of employees and maintain or improve service at the same time. Therefore, the pilot project under way will probably have to be scrapped.

Let me give you another example. The employment centre in Rivière-du-Loup, which serves a vast area, was putting in place practices that would have made it easier to reach unemployed workers in the various communities scattered throughout the territory. Since staff will be cut from 48 to 38, the unemployed will go back to the old practice of merely sending a card to the employment centre. The impact of these cuts will also be difficult to assess, since people will turn to the employment centre more to collect unemployment insurance than to job search. This would run counter to the objectives of the government's planned contract with the people.

I would like to come back to what I was saying about information booth or banking machines. Imagine people who are not used to computers. The clients, who are often the long term or chronically unemployed, are people who freeze before the huge bureaucratic machinery. They have a hard time finding solutions. By making them use a computer and denying them the possibility of receiving individual service, we will put them in an intolerable situation.

What could have been done other than making cuts? In our opinion, the first, the real solution would have been to recognize Quebec's jurisdiction over manpower training and to transfer the employees affected, thus allowing us to correct some rather absurd situations.

For example, the federal network now manages 27 manpower programs, while the Quebec network handles 25. There are some 100 Canada Employment Centres in Quebec, whose services are duplicated by the Société québécoise de la main-d'oeuvre. This requires stakeholders in each region to spend a lot of energy working in concert with others to reach a consensus and develop manpower strategies adapted to local needs. People do so in good faith and make the system work because, if the Canada Employment Centres and the Société québécoise de la main-d'oeuvre followed national criteria and established procedures to the letter, the system would not work. There would be no way for the system to work properly.

As I was saying, we think that the first solution is for the federal government to give jurisdiction to Quebec so that Quebec can streamline operations to make the system work.

• (1715)

Here is another example of measures which seem rather mind-boggling and which are the result of a bad decision. The department informed job search clubs, which are organizations co-operating with the employment centres and which are claimed to be among the priorities of the Department of Human Resources Development, that they will only serve UI beneficiaries.

The documents on the reform refer to more partnership agreements and more co-operation with all sorts of organizations capable of doing the job at a lesser cost. At the same time, job search clubs are informed that they will no longer be allowed to provide services to those who are not UI beneficiaries.

Just imagine knocking at the door of one such club, whose role is to help people looking for work, and being asked first whether you are a UI beneficiary. If this is not the case, you are out of luck, otherwise you may be referred to a Quebec labour department office.

The case of a person who does not get any UI benefits is truly mind-boggling. For example, a student graduating this year, who is not eligible to UI benefits, who is still a dependent, and therefore not eligible to welfare assistance, will not be able to get any help. I do not think this is the right way to treat people.

Before making a decision and following up on the proposals made by his officials, the minister should conduct a vast consultation exercise among MPs regarding the proposed administrative reorganization.

Such a consultation is important, both for the government and the opposition parties. It could be done regionally. For example, the members from Quebec, Ontario, the western provinces and the Maritimes could be invited and informed of the impact of