

Government Orders

I would suggest that the federal government should withdraw completely from all employment, manpower, social assistance and training matters. At the same time, I would suggest that the federal government should transfer to the government closest to the people, the provincial government, the money needed to put in place a real full employment policy, as the Quebec government wishes. This will demonstrate concretely the government's commitment to the equality and social security it refers to in clause 6 of its bill. I thank you and I hope that this government has heard my message.

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government promised Quebecers that many things would change if they voted no in the October 30, 1995, referendum.

A mere three weeks after the referendum, Quebecers are already getting a taste of changes to come as the Minister of Human Resources Development presents Bill C-96 to merge four departments into a single one. But at the same time, as could be expected, he gives himself broader powers, continues to invade provincial jurisdictions and goes against the quasi unanimous consensus in Quebec on this issue.

Back in 1991, the Bourassa government wanted Quebec to be responsible for all expenditures relating to manpower development, including training. At the time, Mr. Bourbeau, the minister responsible, had written his federal counterpart a very clear letter on this subject.

Time and time again, the Quebec national assembly requested almost unanimously that Ottawa withdraw from this provincial area of jurisdiction. After this bill was introduced, several major stakeholders in Quebec made representations against the HRD minister's centralizing designs. For example, the Société québécoise de développement de la main-d'oeuvre takes issue with the government repeatedly trying to interfere in provincial areas of jurisdiction.

According to the SQDM, clauses 6 and 20 of Bill C-96 would empower the Minister of Human Resources Development to enter into agreements with a province, a group of provinces, agencies of provinces, financial institutions and such other persons or bodies as the minister considers appropriate, to improve the labour market and promote equality and social security.

In so doing, the minister blatantly violates provincial jurisdiction and goes directly against Prime Minister Chrétien's promises of decentralization during the referendum campaign. These promises were short lived. When questioned on this by the Bloc Québécois, the minister said, with rare degree of arrogance, that the opposition had obviously not even bothered to read the bill.

• (1225)

Not only must this bill be read line by line, it must also be read between the lines. One must do more than read the bill, and when that happens, one realizes that it is totally different from what it appears to be, because it allows the federal government to interfere in areas of provincial jurisdiction.

In response to another question from the Leader of the Opposition, the minister answered that he felt that the hon. member had strayed substantially from the line of logic and reason. That attitude shows clearly that the minister does not understand the issue and that he insults every Quebec stakeholder opposed to the new bill.

Even the Conseil du patronat, and this is quite something because this staunch supporter of federalism rarely agrees with the Bloc's philosophy, is asking the minister to amend, if not withdraw, Bill C-96.

With the rapid development of new technologies and the globalization of markets, Quebec industry must quickly adapt to meet the new challenges of the world economy. Manpower training plays a vital role in ensuring that our workers are familiar with state-of-the-art technology and can meet the needs of the Quebec labour market.

Currently, there are close to 70,000 jobs which are available in Quebec but remain unfilled because adequate occupational training has not been provided. The Quebec government recently introduced legislation to encourage companies to offer more in-house training.

However, a lot remains to be done and, without total control in the sector, the provincial government cannot properly meet the expectations of the Quebec labour market. The federal and provincial governments are always competing to show workers which of the two levels of government can best meet their expectations and aspirations.

When this happens, it costs millions of dollars in unnecessary duplication. Such duplication costs several hundreds of millions in the manpower training sector, and that is a real shame. For example, in the Eastern Townships, for every dollar spent on manpower training, 42 cents go to administrative costs. Over 40 per cent, more specifically 42 per cent, of the amount which should be used for manpower development is used instead to pay for course organization, promotional efforts and course delivery. Forty per cent of every dollar spent. This is an incredible waste of energy and money.

Unfortunately, Quebec workers are the ones affected by the stubbornness of the federal government and of its Minister of Human Resources Development. Moreover, since the 1990 UI reform, the federal government has been making extensive use of the UI fund for training purposes.