

Government Orders

That way of doing things shows that local needs are ignored. Much has been said about the major differences between the various regions of Canada, but national standards do not take those differences into account at all. The bill that we are debating is just like the others. It assumes that as far as student loans and education are concerned, the needs are exactly the same in Newfoundland, Quebec and British Columbia.

Finally, these national standards infringe upon democracy because people in the provinces have elected members to provincial legislatures, they have placed their confidence in them and given them powers, and the introduction of national standards will eventually erode an important part of provincial responsibility.

In fact, clause 14 provides that, in order to receive alternative payments, a provincial government will have to satisfy, not inform but satisfy, the minister, I quote: "by written notice received by the Minister before the beginning of the loan year in question, that, in relation to the matter in question, the provincial student financial assistance plan has substantially the same effect as the plan established by this Act".

This is totally unacceptable and I wonder, if the Supreme Court were to study this intrusion in a provincial jurisdiction, it would not decide in favour of the arguments presented by the Official Opposition.

It is unacceptable that provincial governments would have to justify their student financial assistance plans to the federal Minister of Human Resources Development since education is exclusively a provincial jurisdiction.

In the context we all know very well, where a large proportion of Quebecers are against the federal system, one could say the central government is doing all it can to provoke a general outcry. This seems due to a very questionable sense of politics; it is hard to say if it is pure stupidity or provocation.

This whole question is particularly important for Quebec because it is crucial that Quebecers manage their own education system.

Let me conclude by saying that Quebec's record in this regard shows that Quebec has acted responsibly in setting up such a system. We must also keep in mind that education is a vital instrument for cultural and linguistic development. Quebec cannot afford not to be in control of this sphere of activity. Our French-language universities are shining brightly. They are almost everywhere and their vitality leaves no doubt. You can find graduates of French-language universities in every sector. I think we set a remarkable example for the rest of Canada. While developing its French-language universities, Quebec was generous enough—I think the word is exact—to allow its anglophone minority to have its own universities. No other province

did such a thing, except New Brunswick with Moncton University. Everywhere else, francophones must make do with bilingual universities. We know the results.

• (1320)

Mr. François Langlois (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, it was refreshing to hear the hon. member for Louis-Hébert give us this historical reminder of what we always accepted in Quebec. The hon. member mentioned the rights of English-speaking Quebecers, rights that we respected to the point that, at one time, there were three English universities in Quebec: Sir George Williams, McGill and Bishop's, in Lennoxville, and only one French university, Laval, which had a campus in Montreal. This does not go very far back in the collective memory of Quebecers. We have to repeat it, over and over again, to show the degree of tolerance we exhibited in the area of education. Of course, we have caught up. The Montreal campus became the Université de Montréal, a university was created in Sherbrooke and then, in the mid 1960s, we had the creation and expansion of the Université du Québec network.

This being said, the rights of English-speaking Quebecers are well protected, and a sovereign Quebec would guarantee these rights in its constitution.

The bill in front of us questions the concept of opting out in the historical meaning of the term, in its constitutional meaning, a concept which was introduced at the time of the first agreements, the so-called Sauvé-Diefenbaker agreements at the end of the 1950s. Quebec could opt out, because at that time it was the only province to ask for the right to withdraw from a federal program in exchange for full compensation. That way, Quebec was not subject to what we call federal standards, and what others call national standards. The opting out provisions were always maintained. We had the Lesage-Diefenbaker, Lesage-Pearson and Johnson-Pearson formulas, and finally the Bourassa-Trudeau formula, although the agreements were scarcer at that time.

Essentially, what Quebec Premiers Sauvé, Lesage and Johnson have obtained is the right to opt out with full compensation without having to justify their decision. Finally, we are back to the concept advocated by Sir John A. Macdonald of a legislative union in Canada. They want to legislate here for all of the provinces while leaving them a small way out. Ottawa tells them: If you want to opt out, you will be able to do so provided you can convince us, the federal government, that your provincial legislation meets federal or national standards. In the end, the one giving that power, the federal government, under conditions precedent, is reserving the right to say: No, you have not convinced us and so we are keeping that power and we are going to continue to administer the program or else you will receive no transfer payments.