

*Government Orders*

Given that the appropriate authority is responsible for determining the level and the results achieved, clearly it also decides issues of an educational or academic nature. As it so happens, the federal minister is acquiring a great deal of power in that from now on, he will be designating the appropriate authorities. Perhaps he does not understand the full implications of this new power because he will now be able to influence not only students, but university programs as well. We have said it and we will say it again: this legislation is a thinly veiled attempt to lay the groundwork for a federal department of education.

Some of my hon. colleagues, in particular those who sit on the same side of the House as the Bloc, will say that we are somewhat paranoid about jurisdictional matters.

Let me just say this: hon. members should know that the way to analyze legislation is to look at the words it contains, not at the intent expressed by the legislator. When the legislator says: "I would never use the powers that I have been given", you may well question his motives and even if you trust him, you never know who will be the next minister or the next party in power. Legislators cannot frame laws by saying that the strong words they have used are just words, the full force of which will never be applied. They cannot say that these strong words really mask some good intentions, but that the important thing is that the authority provided will never be abused. Legislators would be wise not to ignore the meaning of the words used. And this law is saying the following: the only real power the provinces have is to opt out of the federal program. This is the only power they have left, the only way they can exercise any influence. They have nothing else.

• (2210)

Basically, with the two pieces of legislation passed in 1964 and in 1994, we have moved from the provinces having complete decision-making authority over educational matters to the provinces, even if they exercise the right to opt out, being subjected to fastidious regulations.

That is what I mean, what the Bloc Quebecois means by centralizing legislation. I might add excessively centralizing, because not only does it give this minister powers he assumes in jurisdictions which are not his, but he assumes these powers with such intensity, such excess. It is practically unheard of.

Not only does the minister have the power to designate the appropriate authorities but listen to this: "The Minister may give directives to any appropriate authority respecting the exercise or performance of any of its powers, duties or functions under this Act or the regulations, and such directives are binding on the appropriate authority." Madam Speaker, you may never have encountered such a provision in an act and if you did, it must have been very occasionally. At least, that is what the

legislative counsel told us in committee. Personally, I am familiar with a number of these acts and I have never, ever seen anything like this.

The minister assumes not only power, but absolute power. In the future, any decision regarding the designation of universities as the educational institutions attended by the students for the purpose of obtaining a loan as well as all decisions regarding educational levels, satisfactory results and student needs will be made at the discretion of the prince. This legislation is surprisingly centralizing. This is a bill about which our colleagues opposite will say: "Some provinces are applauding", while my opposition colleagues will say: "We have consulted with one or two provinces and they seem quite pleased."

• (2215)

We know that three Canadian provinces have already carried out their own reforms and aligned them on what they knew was coming. But it came before the current government took office. The reforms were carried out last year. As you know, Madam Speaker, a new government will follow its predecessor's policy if it lacks imagination and the will to do otherwise.

Three provincial governments, namely New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Alberta, had already aligned their policies on that of the federal government. Coincidentally, it was these governments that the Committee on Human Resources Development was advised to invite. Before we knew that these provinces had already aligned their own programs on that of the federal government.

That said, these provinces putting their trust in the federal government are keeping their eyes closed. If they dared read the text and go beyond the minister's generous promises, they would realize that there are left with only one option: opting out of the program. We said it very clearly in committee: "If they are not happy, all they have to do is opt out". It is the only way they can still exert some influence.

After the federal program is in place, it will be costly for the provinces to opt out, which means that centralization will continue. You may say: "But is this centralization not desirable? Is it not preferable to have in Canada a super department of Education dealing directly with universities and colleges?"

You know that I am a sovereignist, that I would never accept that, and that I would fight to the bitter end to protect Quebec from such a measure. The rest of Canada might want a super department of education. I say that we should hold a debate and decide whether or not to have such a department of education, but the provinces should at least have a role to play. In this legislation, the provinces have no role. I should qualify that and say that they have no role other than the one which the federal minister is prepared to give them. It is for the minister to decide.