

Brief of the Marxist-Leninist Party of Quebec

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Bill 60

Charter affirming the values of State secularism and religious neutrality and of equality between women and men, and providing a framework for accommodation requests

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About Bill 60

The Quebec government tabled Bill 60 on November 7. The Minister responsible for Democratic Institutions and Active Citizenship, Bernard Drainville, said the bill sets out how the government intends to realize its aim of «rallying Quebecers around common values» and «clarifying the social contract.» The Marois government gave a December 20 deadline to receive briefs and requests to make interventions on the bill, and stated that a public consultation would start on January 14, 2014.

Bill 60 contains 12 chapters and three annexes which are said to detail «the rules, considerations, powers and modalities through which to affirm rights.»

Chapter I: Religious Neutrality and Secular Nature of Public Bodies

Chapter II: Duties and Obligations of Personnel Members of Public Bodies

Chapter III: Obligation to Have Face Uncovered

Chapter IV: Rules of Application

Chapter V: Handling of Accommodation Requests on Religious Grounds

Chapter VI: Implementation Policies

Chapter VII: Rules Applicable to the Educational Childcare Services Sector

Chapter VIII: Responsibilities and Accountability

Chapter IX: Powers and Functions of the Minister

Chapter X: Powers of the Government

Chapter XI: Amending Provisions

Chapter XII: Transitional and Final Provisions

Schedule I: Public Bodies

Schedule II: Persons Considered Personnel Members of a Public Body

Schedule III: Bodies, Institutions and Offices Made Subject to this Charter by the Government -- Applicable Provisions -- Terms and Conditions

The explanatory notes for the bill state that its aim is, «to establish a Charter affirming the values of State secularism and religious neutrality and of equality between women and men, and providing a framework for accommodation requests.» It goes on to say that a further purpose is «to specify, in the Charter of human rights and freedoms, that the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by that Charter are to be exercised in a manner consistent

with the values of equality between women and men and the primacy of the French language as well as the separation of religions and State and the religious neutrality and secular nature of the State, while making allowance for the emblematic and toponymic elements of Quebec's cultural heritage that testify to its history.»

When the bill was tabled, Premier Pauline Marois explained that, «Our draft charter permits the affirmation of common rules that we want to give ourselves so we can live in diversity and harmony. We affirm that our desire is to build a Quebec in which we can better live together.»

Minister Drainville for his part stated, «There are lessons to be drawn from history. What divided us in recent years is the lack of clear rules.» He continued: «There must be clear rules in which to frame requests for religious accommodation, and that is what we will do [...] The best way to ensure respect for all religions is for the State to have no religion.»

Three further objectives were given for purposes of inviting public comment on the website nosvaleurs.gouv.qc.ca:

1. Define clear rules for everyone: «Since 2006, there have been many well-publicized cases of religious accommodation that revealed a profound malaise in Quebec. To preserve social peace and encourage harmony, we want to avoid leaving tensions to build-up. Clear rules concerning religious accommodation would contribute to integration and social cohesion. There would be benefits for all Quebecers, including newcomers. We would be better served by a state that treats us all equally.»

2. Affirming Quebec values: «The contribution of Quebecers of all origins has permitted the building of an open society with shared fundamental values. These values define Quebec society and constitute a contract of adhesion, notably, the equality between women and men, the religious neutrality of Quebec's state institutions, and recognition of a common historical heritage. What we are proposing today, with the affirmation of these values, is to build a strong Quebec identity, whether one is born here or elsewhere.»

3. Establish the religious neutrality of the state: «The state has the duty to neutrality which follows implicitly from the freedom of conscience and religion. The best means by which to respect the beliefs of each person, is for the state to remain neutral and not have any religion. This principle favours pluralism by ensuring the equal and just treatment of all beliefs.»

Introduction

Overall, the PMLQ thinks this bill is fundamentally flawed and should be withdrawn *in toto*.

The identity of any people, Quebecois or any other, is not merely a legal category. The identity of a people emerges historically according to the economic, social and other conditions of those who live in a definite territory in a relationship of mutual dependence in the modern sense of the word. An identity exists for everyone to see and to recognize. In the case of Quebec, it exists in its concrete reality. Despite the fact that the Quebec nation has yet to constitute itself as an independent nation-state, its identity exists as an act of being. It can be strengthened only by promoting modern practices consistent with the demands of the times. This is what will truly strengthen social cohesion and the integration of all citizens and residents within a society created to suit their needs as human persons living in the complicated world of the 21st century.

The word *identity* signifies, “A characteristic of two beings or things that are but two different aspects of a single reality, which constitute one and the same being” (*Larousse Dictionary*). How does one protect and strengthen Quebec’s identity?

What is it amongst Quebeckers that constitutes this sameness, this Quebec being? Speaking objectively, they share a territory, an economic system and a political system. Their main language of communication is French. They also at present share a citizenship of the country called Canada, live in North America and so on. A citizenship or membership in a definite body politic imparts sameness to all in the political sense of providing all with the possibility of enjoying the same rights and duties. All of these shared elements forge a sameness, which over time gives rise to a common psychology conditioned by time and space. It evolves and changes according to the involvement of the people at any particular historical juncture. In the 21st century, at a time of global interaction at an increasingly rapid rate, Quebec’s identity can only be forged by recognizing the rights of Quebeckers by virtue of their being human and members of the particular body politic that exists as Quebec.

The values of Quebec society are based on a modern identity forged by Quebeckers themselves and informed by the experience of other peoples, which recognizes the rights of all. The implementation of the values Quebec society espouses may require regulations

to guide those responsible for leading at all levels, but it does not require more laws. Regulations must be based on objective criteria carefully developed to avert Eurocentric or any other considerations not conducive to modern nation-building. Eurocentrism is a form of ethnocentrism, which is the belief in the inherent superiority of one's own group and culture accompanied by a feeling of contempt for other groups and cultures. It is a tendency to view and evaluate other groups or cultures in terms of one's own. A Eurocentric viewpoint believes in the inherent superiority of the Europeans and their cultures accompanied by a feeling of contempt for non-European groups and cultures. It is a tendency to view and evaluate other groups or cultures in terms of the dominant European cultures.

Human rights legislation should be directed at the actions of governments not individuals. Furthermore, governments must be neutral and represent the temporal authority not an ecclesiastic one. Members of the public service and public school system must not proselytize. They must carry out their duties as per the requirements of their jobs or as assigned by government curricula. That is understood. Not to do so is already grounds for hiring and firing. It does not require special legislation.

The requirement to show one's face in public service is one thing, but interfering with how the human person dresses is entirely another. It must not be subject to laws. Normal workplace regulations are sufficient to regulate what constitutes decent or indecent, and therefore acceptable clothing at a place of work. Clothing which is too revealing is not considered an acceptable standard of dress, just as head coverings suited for outside wear not inside wear are also not considered normal work wear. Evening or sleeping clothes are not considered normal work wear either just as informal clothes even when accepted on specially assigned days like funky Fridays are not expected to be full of holes or beyond a certain pale. Why should these matters now be taken up as a matter of law, especially using essentially Eurocentric criteria? At what point will a hairstyle, the presence of a beard, or a certain kind of beard, or the use of certain colours or body piercings or tattoos become causes for the criminalization of individual conduct? It is unacceptable.

At no time has Quebec identity been forged by attempting to make all members of society identical in thought or in reality. Instead, the fundamental law of the land should proclaim that the basis of unity as well as diversity is the quality of being human and that all people have rights by virtue of being human. On this basis, political rights, cultural rights, the rights which belong to women by virtue of their womanhood, the rights belonging to the youth and children by virtue of their position as the younger generation who will have the responsibility to take society into the future, the rights of the elderly, of workers, of the indigenous peoples and others will be guaranteed. Such rights can neither be given nor taken away nor forfeited in any way. Today, there is no need to issue an endless number of formal declarations. The necessity is to ensure that the right to conscience, which is the quality that makes us human, exists *in fact* and not as a mere formality. The right to conscience has to be an integral, essential feature of the conditions in which people work and live, and not a footnote with no relevance to life. This is achieved by upholding

the rights of all based on a public authority that provides the rights of the people with a guarantee. At no time should the state infringe on the right to conscience or interfere with the human person.

Identifying with something that constitutes an infringement on one's own right to conscience is the essence of a model of integration based on privilege in lieu of rights and, by virtue of this, the acceptance of a higher authority that has privileges over the citizenry. If a person misbehaves, the privileges can be taken away. Put another way, if a person does not behave in a certain way dictated by a higher authority with privileges over the citizenry, the privileges are taken away or not given. The laws enacted by the National Assembly should not be mechanisms to deprive people of rights or infringe on their right to conscience by making it a privilege to work in the public service and demanding certain behaviour dictated by a higher authority with privileges over the citizenry.

In this regard, the PMLQ notes that despite the government's claim that Bill 60 was put forward to strengthen secularism, promote the equality of men and women and defend the Quebec identity, a widespread perception persists that the PQ's main purpose is to isolate its adversaries in the National Assembly and gain an electoral advantage in the coming election. Despite denials, the government has not successfully combated this perception. This is not conducive to furthering the fundamental stated aims of the bill.

At each stage of Quebec's development, Quebeckers have hailed from other lands and established a very definite identity for themselves in the course of life itself. Today, Quebec brings together people who come from all corners of the globe and myriad circumstances. Together they will continue to forge the Quebec identity consistent with the requirements of the times affirming their rights by virtue of being human and building a society that provides those rights with a guarantee. To establish a Quebec identity based on guaranteeing the enjoyment of those rights within the concrete Quebec reality would be an honourable act.

Together, all members of society will make their contribution to building a truly modern nation. Said another way, today the condition of being within a truly modern nation demands that everything be judged based on the extent to which the conditions permit the actualization of human rights.

The Secular Nature of the Quebec State

A fundamental purpose of Bill 60 is "to establish a Charter affirming the values of state secularism and religious neutrality." The PMLQ sees no need to repeat once again the secular nature of the Quebec state. In Quebec, no danger is apparent that the public state authority will become ecclesiastic, a form where priests run the state, not governments elected by the people. A real danger for the public authority comes from the stranglehold the monopolies

exercise on political decisions. To suggest the state may become an ecclesiastical authority diverts from the existing danger.

Also, people have profound and legitimate concerns that the rule is not of, by and for the people. The system of government called representative democracy, and the electoral process do not transform the popular will into the legal will. Instead, the electoral process brings political parties to power that represent sectarian interests. Those parties vie for power to serve their sectarian interests. The deficiencies and antiquated nature of representative democracy and the electoral process require democratic renewal and fundamental reforms. However, they do not signify a danger that priests will once again run the state.

In Canada at the federal level certainly, people are concerned over the influence of an evangelical sect called dominionism on the decisions taken by the Harper government. But this too is at heart a political problem of lack of an effective electoral process that transforms the popular will into the legal will. The current system brings political parties to power that are not representative of the popular will. At the federal level, similar to Quebec, the real danger comes from the takeover of public institutions by private monopoly interests. The danger is not of a takeover by an ecclesiastic authority but the serious collapse of the public authority and its replacement or domination by private monopoly interests.

Explanation

The issue of the separation of church and state was first settled in Quebec by the English in the 1870s. At that time, the Privy Council in London, England ruled against the Catholic Church under Montreal Bishop Ignace Bourget who was acting in concert with the Papacy in Rome under Pope Pius IX. The ecclesiastic forces made a bid to become the authority in all matters of a temporal nature when they challenged where Joseph Guibord could be buried. Guibord had been excommunicated because he was a member of the Institut Canadien and espoused beliefs the Church considered heretical. On November 21, 1874, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council ruled Guibord would be buried in Cote des Neiges Cemetery whether or not the Church agreed. This ruling put an end to the pretence of the Church as the supreme authority in Quebec over temporal affairs.

However, the Privy Council did not deprive the Church of the privileged position historically granted by the empire, as a “reasonable accommodation,” to keep the people in check. The Catholic Church continued to play a major role controlling public responsibilities such as education and educational institutions, hospitals, orphanages and institutions for the poor and aged, amongst other functions.

The conscience of the Quebec people during the Quiet Revolution was directed in large measure against the state of oppression and backwardness imposed on them by the Church. The people took a firm stand against any control by the Church of public institutions in Quebec and turned their backs on the Duplessis era.

Today, the main problem as far as public authority is concerned, comes from a state authority being usurped by the dictate of the global monopolies. The problem today is not separation of Church and State but separation of private monopoly interests and State.

Dress Codes

The section of the bill entitled *Restriction on Wearing Religious Symbols* reads:

“5. In the exercise of their functions, personnel members of public bodies must not wear objects such as headgear, clothing, jewelry or other adornments which, by their conspicuous nature, overtly indicate a religious affiliation.”

In the opinion of the PMLQ, this attempt to have the state monitor the clothing of individuals working for the civil service or public schools at any level constitutes state interference with the human person. As is already the rule, dress code instructions are warranted by the conditions of work for safety reasons or when uniform dress codes are mandated based on the professional service. When it comes to what is acceptable to wear at a place of work, this should be determined by the institutions and workplaces themselves, as a matter of regulation. Dress codes should not be legislated by the National Assembly. Guidelines on the matter must adhere to the rule of law and must themselves be neutral and apply to all equally, and not be based on subjective criteria.

Explanation

In history, coercion of the human person in all kinds of ways has always been rejected, including the prescription of what the people can and cannot wear. This interference is not acceptable in any modern society, especially when a Eurocentric approach is taken to determine what is and what is not acceptable clothing, ornamentations, hair styles, beards etc. In the days of black slavery, enslaved women were often forced to wear turbans on the plantations. Now that many women have adopted turbans as a specific statement of their own, is society to dictate once again to them what they can and cannot wear? The proposal is a very backward step.

Already, the culture in Quebec’s public school boards permits a high level of tolerance when it comes to dress as well as piercings and tattoos amongst not only students but also teachers and education support staff. Is this cultural tolerance now to be subject to laws passed by the National Assembly? Many people have tattoos including the youth. Once they become adults, are they to be prohibited from becoming teachers because they have tattoos? Must they be forced to undergo surgery to remove their tattoos as a condition of employment? Will the National Assembly dare pass laws on such matters?

We do not think so. Such actions are not acceptable because the National Assembly has no business interfering with the human person.

When it comes to the manner of dress, more often than not, the line between what constitutes normal clothing for peoples of different national origins and what constitutes specific religious symbols is barely discernible. Even within and between religious sects, what is a religious symbol and what is normal wear is often a matter of great dispute.

Even within communities, there is a dearth of general knowledge and people are not of one mind as to the significance of various articles of clothing. For instance, according to some adherents of the Sikh religion, the turban is mandated by the 10th Guru to keep the hair clean and orderly. Yet according to the historical record, long hair, along with a comb normally kept on the head, the steel bracelet, the kirpan, and boxer shorts are considered Sikh symbols and the turban is but an article of clothing.

Who will rule what turbans are articles of religious clothing and which are not? Non-religious Sikhs may consider a turban an article of clothing, which they have worn their entire lives and justly feel it an affront to be identified as religious or not because of a turban or that they cannot dress as they please. A dangerous precedent is set when the state starts to identify and tell people who is and who is not religious. The role of the state is to focus on citizenship rights and duties and its own responsibilities, not anything else. How many Czechs, French, Germans, Austrians, Poles and other citizens of Europe found out they were Jews only when they were forced into the death camps by the Nazis?

Who but oneself is entitled to define who one is? Similarly, many atheists object to being listed as Catholics, Protestants, Muslims or Jews due to the use of categories inherited from the past that are clearly no longer socially relevant. In a similar vein, Bill 60 draws unwarranted conclusions about people based on a false consciousness of what determines religious criteria. To make decisions about people based on how they dress is not a modern practice. Many families in society do not consider religion to be their identifying factor. People wear clothes, not religions.

Furthermore, false consciousness of religions is commonplace. For example, Sikhism arose as a secular movement against the Hindu caste system. Sikhism came into being to level the playing field. Besides other things, it targeted symbols that contributed to maintaining the oppression of the poor by the rich, the oppression of women, the separation of men and women and the creation of so-called untouchables. People of different religions joined Sikhism to oppose the caste system and other forms of oppression. Whereas formerly, turbans might be worn by kings and their retinue, entire male populations began wearing turbans as one measure to eliminate a distinguishing feature of the discriminatory hierarchy of the caste system. Turbans were thus adopted as an item of clothing for Indians of many national origins whose traditions were linked to the Sikh enlightenment movement irrespective of whether they were religious or not.

So too is the shalwar kameez an article of clothing, often accompanied by a shawl or scarf worn over the head, as with the hijab in certain cultures. They are not religious symbols but items of clothing linked in culture with modesty.

We ask the members of the National Assembly: If they consider turbans as religious symbols when worn by Sikhs, should Sikhs take off their turbans when they come to work in the public domain and sport their long hair tied in a knot above their heads? Will they then be asked to cut off their hair, if they are to keep their jobs? And what of beards, should all men be clean shaven to work in the public service? Where does all this dictate end?

The fact remains that turbans of all kinds are worn all over Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and certain parts of South and Central America as well as Europe and North America by both men and women. In many cultures, beards of all styles are worn by men. They carry all kinds of connotations, but largely they are fashion and personal statements and not primarily religious symbols.

Who is going to decide what objects “overtly indicate a religious affiliation”? Who will decide who wears these objects out of religious belief and those who wear them out of other concerns or because they like them for their appearance or find them practical? Will those who wear a head scarf because they have lost their hair due to illness be accommodated, although singled out, and thus made to feel conspicuous? Again, where does all this end?

The Quebec government says the Bill is going “to facilitate social cohesion and the integration of children without regard to social or ethnic origin or religious affiliation.” Far from it, these provisions can only lead to endless litigation to defend people subjected to discipline and job loss for refusal to comply with an interpretation that defies their own considerations for what they are wearing.

The government should understand that these arguments and measures are being used worldwide by those who refuse to build modern societies in which the rights of all are recognized. Religious neutrality cannot be cited as a pretext to justify Eurocentric notions of what constitutes acceptable clothing and what does not.

Can the government cite examples where wearing what the bill calls “objects which, by their conspicuous nature, overtly indicate a religious affiliation” have caused problems for users of public services and prevented them from receiving the services they need or from being served in a professional manner? Surely, any example of too much zeal in choice of clothing at a place of work is best dealt with by the local management or administration based on objective criteria of what is and what is not permissible dress. Has this method of dealing with problems not been sufficient in the past? When should a government pass laws to mandate dress codes targeting individual persons? Never! It is not the duty of government to target individual persons and their culture or religious practices.¹

Equality of Men and Women

Bill 60 says that a purpose of the bill is to specify that the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Charter must be exercised in a manner consistent with the value of equality between men and women. Nonetheless, how Bill 60 uses equality of men and women to guide decisions upholding Quebec values is problematic and discriminatory.

The Bill advocates depriving women of their jobs in the public sector because they wear a hijab, especially in childcare. This it claims will be a step towards their emancipation. First, is it not insulting to women to assume that wearing a hijab or other clothing has been imposed on them by men? Women who wear a hijab do so for all sorts of reasons -- as a cultural norm, a personal choice, an act of defiance against Eurocentrism, or because it is considered a religious duty. And where women are being forced to dress a certain way against their wishes, how will it assist their emancipation to deprive them of employment and an income, and force them to stay at home?

As Quebec women and women all over the world began working in factories and other workplaces and were no longer dependent on the income of their spouses, they started winning their freedom. So too today, it is very important for women to hold their own jobs and make their own incomes. Only with economic independence can they become less prone to all the forms of oppression and indignity based on dependence. They are also much better prepared and in a better position to escape domestic violence, poverty and other problems, as well as follow their own choices and not those imposed by others.

In the case of women and girls in families from all backgrounds where backward notions of father right or husband right prevail, economic independence is an acute need. For the government to dictate how women must not dress to work in childcare or lose their jobs is a truly backward step. We are told the Taliban does not permit women to work and forces them to wear a burqa and stay at home and to oppose the backward beliefs of the Taliban, we are to force women not to work because they wear a hijab? Who is the «we» telling women what to do and not to do? Certainly it is not a characteristic of the Quebec identity to tell women and families how to live their lives. Why did we get rid of the interference of the priests and the Church if this is the case?

To repeat. Today, one should worry that due to increasing economic insecurity, domestic violence is increasing on an alarming scale. Insecurity and violence are a detriment to women and children no matter what their national origin may be or what they wear. An antidote to this is to ensure that women and children are economically independent. They must be guaranteed a standard of living that permits them as human persons to sustain themselves independently of others who may harm them, whether they may be fathers, partners, husbands or anyone else.

Women must also know that their children and parents also have independent means to sustain themselves. With economic independence, problems of overt oppression of women, children and the elderly can be sorted out. This process is not helped by creating conditions where some women may be forced to quit their jobs and become isolated once again within their homes because the government is making how they dress a matter of law. Targeting women for their dress in no way sorts out problems surrounding the equality of men and women, the neutrality of state institutions, or social cohesion and integration. It will only make matters worse.

In the past, first the Church and priests would dictate what women could and could not do. Then came the turn of colonial governments comprised of white men of property, followed by so-called responsible governments doing the same. They would dictate what women could and could not do. Women were not even considered persons until well into the twentieth century. Because governments today are comprised of both men and women, must the people accept that those men and women in positions of authority have the right to dictate what men and women of certain national backgrounds can and cannot do, including even what they wear? Is that what the equality of men and women has come to mean?

Dietary Restrictions

The PMLQ also has a problem with Section 30.3 on dietary restrictions. Bill 60 says:

«30. In order to facilitate social cohesion and the integration of children without regard to social or ethnic origin or religious affiliation, the policy must provide, among other things, that:

«[...] 3. a repeated activity or practice stemming from a religious precept, in particular with regard to dietary matters, must not be authorized if its aim, through words or actions, is to teach children that precept.»

Many diets, dietary restrictions and lifestyle eating philosophies abound in the world today, which includes Quebec. A modern society researches and understands the basic principles behind diets, dietary restrictions and other eating practices. Research and education are part of making sure modern nutritional needs are met and that society upholds not only nutritional standards but also adequate standards of food inspection, safety and hygiene in food preparation and food security.

Understanding the nutritional make up of various foods, their content as carbohydrates, minerals, fats and proteins; gaining a knowledge of the basic fundamentals behind food allergies, restrictions and diets; and making sure the immune systems of the population are healthy, all form important aspects of the social responsibilities modern governments

must take up as a priority.

Why is the National Assembly diverting from its social responsibility to guarantee the health and well-being of the population and food security by targeting individual habits regarding this or that diet? Who can argue that the distinction between clean and unclean meats, which various cultures have adopted, is based on anything but health concerns? For instance in the past, many so-called clean meats were clean because they came from animals that fed on clean foods, such as certain grasses and grains also considered good for human health. But nowadays many grasses and grains are themselves no longer considered good for human consumption. Many people, not just Muslims or people from the Middle East, today purchase halal meat because of health concerns. Why does the government of Quebec not put its energies into making sure all food available in Quebec is grown in a scientifically verifiable manner making it completely safe for human consumption?

The basic problem in food production today is the stranglehold of monopolies on food production, preparation and sales, whose aim is not social responsibility but their narrow private interest for a good return on their investments. For example, fast food outlets promote obesity. A lack of recreational sports and other organized physical activities in the schools for all without user fees contributes to the non-encouragement of healthy habits including proper eating. Poverty denies families the right to a nutritious diet forcing them to rely on processed foods high in sugars, sodium and all kinds of filler products not good for health. The contamination of the environment makes even water unsafe to drink, without mentioning all the other risks this contamination poses to the food chain and human health.

Today we also have a serious increase of allergies to foods due to many factors not widely understood because of monopoly control over food production and distribution. Lack of public control and research has led to a marked increase of production methods and distribution outside the purview of public authority such as genetically engineered food products, the use of chemicals and fertilizers and the importation of food from afar consumed out of season.

Independent research has shown that certain bad practices weaken immune systems, give rise to allergies and block the development of local food production and distribution, which is a serious threat to food security. Also, the relaxation of standards of food inspection and hygiene contribute to the transmission of illnesses that should be easily kept in check.

Rather than concern itself with its own duties towards the safety of the food chain, the government is amongst other things prohibiting, «(30.3) a repeated activity or practice stemming from a religious precept, in particular in regard to dietary matters.» This «*must not be authorized if its aim, through words or actions, is to teach children that precept.*» Are we not entitled to question the reasons for its preoccupations and priorities?

A note to this brief is provided listing the reasons some foods are considered clean and

some unclean and some of the dietary restrictions for whatever reason. It is important to research and recognize the reason for the dietary restrictions, which the government so casually labels as religious. Most of those dietary restrictions have their origins in the codification of rules and laws practiced by various societies to ensure the protection of health and hygiene amongst increasingly dense populations. To say they have religious precepts is misleading and leads to unwarranted conclusions.²

Can all members of the National Assembly honestly say they have studied dietary matters, their origins and whether or not what they call religious precepts stem from health concerns?

What purpose is served by prohibiting dietary restrictions, practiced by various cultures not just religions, by claiming they come from religious precepts? In fact, they are codified in all kinds of texts, not just religious texts, as practices designed to promote good health and public hygiene. A feature of the codification of dietary restrictions is the positive delineation of dietary principles intended to ensure the physical well-being of the individual and the nation alike through a consistent preventative approach. Today, people in their wisdom or possible lack thereof still follow these instructions. If modern society were to promote modern knowledge and food instructions through the primary and secondary school curricula so that they become general knowledge, and people have the perception and confidence that those instructions are trustworthy, would that not be a far better way to treat this problem than to criminalize people who follow their conscience?

The fitting response to culinary habits, which have been handed down through the ages within definite geographical and climactic conditions, is proper public standards of what is good for those who live and work in the climactic conditions of Quebec while not interfering in the likes and dislikes of people from different cultures and regions. Most important is to make sure all members of society have the economic wherewithal for good nutrition and the confidence that food production and distribution, food security, inspection and education are looked after on a forward looking basis. For instance in Quebec, how many people who no longer make their living through work in agriculture continue to eat too much sugar and starch because of the habits inherited from peasant life when a diet high in calories was required or because of poverty?

Except for those who work in certain industries or agriculture, a high calorie diet is not suitable. Poverty is not suitable under any circumstances, including the dietary restrictions it imposes. If people have the economic means and the proper education and access to healthy food, little by little they will change their habits. To put it another way, they stick to old habits at their own peril. But where is the role of public education and restriction of the food monopolies, when considering the kind of diets necessary for a healthy population? Where is the economic stability to allow all the people to eat good healthy food in which they have confidence? Importantly, why should the state interfere in these matters on a personal level of lifestyle, which only causes ill-will, harm and does not advance society? Why not take up the social responsibility of guaranteeing food availability, quality, security

and inspection, and research and education on all aspects of the people's dietary needs so that they can decide in confidence what they eat or do not eat?

To make special diets a problem facing early childhood education by also declaring it is not economically viable to accommodate other diets or that special diets are interfering with social cohesion and integration is a bad joke. On a most serious aspect of accommodation, there are not enough public daycare spaces available so that all preschool children who wish to attend can be accommodated. How does that facilitate social cohesion and integration?

In Conclusion

The PMLQ stated on September 23 when the proposal for another Charter of Values was first released, that it welcomed the occasion to involve the entire polity in deliberations over the values on which Quebec should be based.

The period the world has entered is highly complex and the way forward is not so obvious. The demand has never been greater to discuss the significance of the experience achieved to date and to engage in its summation to serve the needs of the present and open a path for the future. We must educate ourselves about the definitions inherited from the past and the considerations that informed those who built the nation. While it is true we must study the past, it is also true that such a study will not be helpful unless we first identify the needs of the present. We can then go into the future on a sure footing, with the full weight of our experience to guide us.

We need to appreciate in a profound way the values we espouse, not superficially, but in terms of how they are experienced and understood by all individuals and all their collectives. The aim to harmonize all the competing interests with the general interests of the society is crucial. This must be recognized as an important condition to ensure not only that the discussion is successful but also that social cohesion is strengthened.

The PMLQ thinks no other field of endeavour is more important today than the one we undertake ourselves to define both who we are and the social, political, economic and ecological arrangements we need to flourish.

Bill 60 as presented must be withdrawn or rejected because it fails to overcome the real obstacles that the people of Quebec face at this time. It is by affirming the rights of all by virtue of the fact they are human that a new situation providing these problems with solutions will be created. We will be able to create a modern, sovereign Quebec nation that flourishes because it guarantees the rights of all.

Notes

1. The PMLQ thinks that the following sections of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are pertinent when considering the duties of the state in matters taken up by this Bill.

Article 18.

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 21.

(2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.

Article 29.

(2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

2. Various cultures, not just religions, make a distinction between clean and unclean meats. One only need look at chapters of the Christian bible, *Leviticus* and *Deuteronomy* in particular, which include many issues of health and hygiene. The four chapters of *Leviticus* that follow the listing of clean and unclean meats deal with precautions after childbirth and the means to identify and eliminate the spread of communicable diseases. In *Exodus 15:26*, Moses lists a series of measures to take against the spread of epidemics. In other words, common practices dealing with hygiene were codified at that time.

In ancient times, not only were people taught to avoid eating unclean animals; they were not to touch their dead carcasses. Laws were passed to this effect, which automatically helped control vermin. Common unclean animals would be spiders, flies, bugs, rats, and mice. A dead rat in a house was to be carefully taken out and buried. In an effort to avoid such problems, housewives were to keep a clean house. These practices became part of the *Pentateuchal* medical code, applicable to orthodox Jews and many gentiles.

Quite a few cultures do not eat shellfish or scavengers. Generally, those creatures do not hunt for their own food; they eat the dead and decaying matter of our environment. The fact that the meat of shellfish -- shrimp, crabs, lobsters etc. -- is considered unclean by many cultures has nothing to do with religions *per se*. Many illnesses, including instant paralysis, devastate some people every day as a result of eating shellfish. Shrimp, oysters, crab, scallops and mussels are particularly efficient at purifying contaminated

water. They filter large volumes of water every day. Sewage laden with chemicals, toxins and harmful bacteria, parasites and viruses become concentrated in those shellfish. The cause of cholera outbreaks in several areas has been traced to contaminated shrimp, crab, oysters and clams. The symptoms of cholera are explosive diarrhea, leading to rapid dehydration, unconsciousness, hypotension and death.

A pig is also a scavenger. A pig will eat anything. Its digestive system is similar to that of humans, in that the stomach is very acidic. Pigs are gluttonous, never knowing when to stop eating. Their stomach acids become diluted because of the volume of food, allowing all kinds of vermin to pass through this protective barrier. Parasites, bacteria, viruses and toxins can pass into the pig's flesh because of over-eating.

They will eat garbage, feces and even decaying flesh. All that is eaten usually becomes part of the pig's own flesh. Aside from the diseases routinely carried by swine, pork is also a very fatty meat. The toxins in pork are held especially in the fat, which is not isolated from the meat as can be the case in lean beef, but rather, it is dispersed throughout the meat. Many people are concerned that these toxins and infectious agents can be passed on to humans when they eat a pig's flesh.

Three of the six most common food-borne parasitic diseases of humans -- *toxoplasmosis*, *taeniasis* or *cysticercosis* (caused by the pork tapeworm *Taenia solium*) and *trichinellosis* -- are associated with pork consumption. Have these food borne parasites been brought under control? If so, how?

Today, can the Quebec government assure Quebeckers that the meat they eat has been fully inspected and is not full of chemicals, hormones and agents harmful to their health? If it can provide such a guarantee, then why does it not focus its attention of explaining why today pork, for instance, is a healthy meat?

If the government of Quebec can convince those cultures which reject pork, as well as all those who are seriously worried about the safety of the food chain, that they no longer need have any concerns about the consumption of pork, then everyone stands to gain because the pork industry is the means of existence for many Quebec farmers and many of us eat quite a large quantity of pork. Why not educate the population about the Quebec pork industry. What are pigs fed on? How are they fattened? What hormones are pigs given for various reasons, and what is the effect of those hormones on the human immune system and human health? Can the government honestly tell Quebeckers who do not want to eat pork that their practice is religious and not linked to health concerns?

Addendum: Which Ones Are Religious?

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