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Since the Bouchard-Taylor Commission tabled its report in May 2008, you can count on the fingers of one hand how many of the report's 84 recommendations have been implemented by the Liberal government. After the report was tabled, Immigration and Cultural Communities Minister Yolande James tried (to no avail) to steer through a watered-down version of a government policy to combat racism and discrimination that had been promised since 2006. Indeed, just days before the November 2008 elections were called, Quebec's Liberal government announced, to the collective yawn of the media and public, a policy entitled: "La diversité : une valeur ajoutée. Politique gouvernementale pour favoriser la participation de tous à l'essor du Québec" (Diversity: a value added. Government policy to foster universal participation in Quebec's growth).

The 21-point action plan calls for all government departments and agencies to become involved in this process. To put in motion certain aspects of the action plan, the Immigration Minister tabled Bill 16 on September 22, 2009. Entitled *Loi favorisant l'action de l'administration québécoise à l'égard de la diversité culturelle*, this bill sparked controversy by shifting the debate back to "reasonable accommodations." It aimed to get government agencies to adopt accountability rules and guidelines with regard to "management of diversity" so as to lead by example when it comes to ensuring the employment integration of Quebecers of all origins and providing quality services to an increasingly diverse clientele. Some, like the Conseil du Statut de la Femme, see it as limitless obligation on the part of the State to adapt to diversity, without in return placing any onus on immigrants toward Quebec society. Others view the legislation as a step back – if not a reversal – from the "moral contract" between two parties (the members of the minority and the majority), as described in the 1990 policy statement. Still others feel that the bill will end up dead in the water.

The explosive issue of reasonable accommodations is thus coming back to haunt the Charest government, which is being accused of promoting freedom of religion at the expense of gender equality. This question has yet to be resolved, and the recommendations contained in the Bouchard-Taylor report have yet to be acted on. As for open secularism and the wearing of religious symbols, no white paper has been produced to better define the notion of secularism, defend the concept of open secularism and address religious symbols. The report dealt only with representatives of the State, and not the people who receive services. Lastly, the government has produced very little in the way of additional funds, measures or systematic training with regard to raising awareness of diversity, adopting harmonization practices, promoting immigrant integration, cross-culturalism and the French language, and addressing inequalities, discrimination, secularism and research.

Consequently, the government's systematic shift in the recent case involving the niqab worn by a student in a French class at the Cégep de St-Laurent (from now on, face coverings will be banned inside public institutions) has nothing to do with the Bouchard-Taylor recommendations, but a lot to do with the reactions of a public that is

uncomfortable with orthodox religious practices that are often seen as closing oneself off – rather than opening oneself up – to others.

The fact remains that the government's position has no "reasonable" foundation in relation to the excessive restrictions that go with the legal definition of reasonable accommodation (undermining the rights of others, excessive expenditures, posing a threat to public safety, impeding the missions of the institutions in question...). Acquired at no small cost by members of Quebec society, the province's commonly held values – including freedom of conscience and of religion – stand in the way of marginalizing those who do not conform to the majority. These values are being redefined, to be sure.