

Government Orders

from the experiences of folks who are living with their problems in their communities every day.

I encourage those members who have not already planned their round tables or public meetings to do so. They are well worth the trouble.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilbert Fillion (Chicoutimi, BQ): Madam Speaker, throughout his speech, the hon. member had nothing but praise for his minister, the Minister of Human Resources Development. I wonder whether tomorrow morning he will go to his office to receive a token of appreciation.

The hon. member said that the document we are discussing was the result of extensive consultations, and that is the point I would like to discuss: those extensive consultations that produced a reform to be implemented at the expense of the most vulnerable in our society—the unemployed or the beer drinkers, as they call them.

If these consultations were so meticulous, why, when we are consulting the public, does the minister send his go-between to do the ground work in our regions? The hon. member for Outremont is now scouting around Quebec to get the pulse of the people. In my own riding, in Chicoutimi, only fifteen people turned out.

This is a waste of taxpayers' money. In Jonquière, the number of spectators, because that is what they were more than anything else, was even lower, and in Roberval they had to cancel the consultation. Since people do not want to hear about this reform, because it will be at the expense of the most vulnerable in our society, I think the minister should do his homework all over again. The public consultations being conducted by the committee across the country are a sham.

• (1735)

[English]

Mr. St. Denis: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Chicoutimi for his comments and his question, although I believe he has it wrong. To suggest that the member for Outremont needs to go out, scout around and prepare the way for the Minister of Human Resources Development misses the point.

First, I would suggest that a turnout of 15 at the meeting he refers to might also suggest that people are satisfied with the options that have been put on the table. They were not so worried that they had to go out and participate. I put that forward as a possible explanation for the low turnout. In polls that I have read, something in the order of 60 to 65 per cent plus Canadians support the initiatives we are taking in repairing and renewing our social safety net.

Canadians have confidence that we will not take measures that will hurt those in need. To suggest we are doing this on the backs of the needy flies in the face of the philosophy on which our proposals are based. It is an attempt to deploy dollars in a more effective way so that those truly in need can get the help, retraining or assistance they need in order to become players in the workplace.

The hon. member really has it wrong. I would suggest that he re-read the documents. The pulse I get from talking to the people on the street is to keep going for the changes. Move ahead. Do not be worried about our detractors, those who would speak negatively of our initiatives. We all agree changes have to be made. The status quo is not acceptable.

Mr. Nick Discepola (Vaudreuil, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with enthusiasm to the report by the member. I would like to participate in the debate by sharing what my hon. colleague already knows, that I get a little bit upset when I hear day after day, when the government advances any type of reform, we are doing it on the backs of the least fortunate. To use this as an occasion to exploit those more unfortunate for opportunistic reasons I find is self-serving.

My colleague and I both sit on the finance committee and we listen intently to the debate that is going on about the deficit. We both know that if we were to attack or remove outright the subsidies to small businesses, as business has told us, if we were to tax lottery and gambling winnings, and simply do as members of the Bloc Québécois have said: "Cut government spending and defence spending" by 25 per cent, I put it to the House that the \$3 billion the finance minister needs this year and the \$6 billion the finance minister needs next year, the \$9 billion could come from these.

How can members of the opposition continually stand in the House and say that we want to reform social security on the backs of the unemployed, students and the least fortunate? As the member knows, the status quo is not acceptable, not only in Quebec, it is not acceptable anywhere in Canada.

Does he not agree with me that the present programs are outdated, no longer respond to the needs and aspirations of Canadians and Quebecers alike?

Mr. St. Denis: Madam Speaker, my colleague is dead on. He has in very few words concisely put our government's agenda in the proper perspective.

• (1740)

My colleagues—at least the colleagues who would admit it, which would be the members of my party—and I are not receiving from our constituents the complaints about leaving programs exactly the way they are. "Do not touch them". We are not receiving those kinds of comments. People generally recognize that change has to take place. To argue: "Don't make