

Oral Questions

opinions, those who favour the status quo in Canada do not want anything to change.

If the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe tells me that I must use federal powers, we can settle this in two minutes. However, I am so nice that the hon. member criticizes the federal Prime Minister for consulting too much. Now that is a switch!

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SOCIAL PROGRAM REFORM

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, newspapers are reporting this morning that in a report which is now before Cabinet, the human resources minister's panel of experts on social program reform has recommended that further cuts of up to \$6 billion be made to the unemployment insurance program, which would result in over 500,000 claimants being disintegrated.

Will the Minister of Human Resources Development commit now to rejecting out of hand this despicable recommendation aimed once again at reducing the federal deficit at the expense of the unemployed and the most disadvantaged among us?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, I said yesterday that such reports are purely hypothetical and speculative. I do not pay any attention to them. I would advise the hon. member not to pay any attention to them either.

[Translation]

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, are we to understand from the minister's answer that the only way to reduce unemployment is to force people onto welfare?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): No, Mr. Speaker.

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INDIAN AFFAIRS

Mr. David Chatters (Athabasca): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of Indian affairs.

Recently the minister has been travelling across this country telling aboriginal communities if they want self-government to step up and sign on the dotted line. Our party believes there are many serious issues that the government is not addressing in this kamikaze approach to self-government.

Will the minister stop his headlong rush into these deals and ensure that no more deals are signed until full consultation with all concerned citizens takes place and a detailed cost accounting of each deal is disclosed?

Hon. Ron Irwin (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, it is a very broad question with no focus but I am prepared to answer it in this way.

I am as concerned as the hon. member about costs and accountability. I am prepared to work with the Reform Party to that end.

If holding our committee until 6 a.m. this morning for no useful purpose is any indication of the way the hon. member wants to go, I am not with him.

Mr. David Chatters (Athabasca): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question.

The fact that this government believes that cabinet should be the dispute settling mechanism in these deals indicates to me that it is only interested in maintaining the current paternalistic system that now exists.

Will the minister remove the political and partisan interference from self-government agreements and establish an autonomous body to deal with the dispute settlements?

Hon. Ron Irwin (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, again it is a matter of different approaches and different philosophies. We are working with the aboriginal people.

I might remind the hon. member that our techniques vary in this way. The first question you asked in this House had 58 words in it and eight were derogatory. Eight were derogatory about the very people you purport to be defending today.

• (1125)

The Speaker: I would remind all hon. members that both questions and answers should be directed to the Chair.

Mr. David Chatters (Athabasca): Mr. Speaker, I have a further supplementary question. It was a very interesting response. If this minister really had any sense of responsibility, he would have appeared before the committee to defend his own legislation.

We heard from witnesses who had real concerns with this deal. The minister had the arrogance to ignore these concerns. If the minister will not defend his legislation, will he defend the complete abdication of his responsibility and his apparent disdain for the democratic process? What does he have to say—

The Speaker: Order, please. I would encourage all hon. members when they are putting questions if they would put the questions. I think we are getting into a great deal of editorializing, if you will.