

projects that will be of enormous service and contribution to this country.

In this time and age when we particularly want young Canadians to feel proud of their country we think there is nothing wrong with wearing a maple leaf on their chests.

* * *

[Translation]

SOCIAL PROGRAM REFORM

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

Faced with the amount of criticism of both the federal government's intentions for the reform of social programs and its way of proceeding, the Minister of Human Resources Development had to cancel the federal-provincial conference that was to take place this very day in Ottawa. Furthermore, the impasse between Quebec and Ottawa on labour force training continues.

Does the minister confirm that it is because other provinces besides Quebec were strongly opposed to the government's policies and procedure that he had to cancel the federal-provincial conference at the last minute, something rare if not unique, without first advising the Prime Minister?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is unaware of some recent history.

To begin with all the first ministers and the Prime Minister agreed in a meeting in late December that there must be a social policy review. Since that time we have had two very important rounds of meetings with ministers of all provincial governments. We held them last January and last March. Substantial areas of agreement were reached.

The reason we did not proceed with the meeting today is that some provinces wanted more time. It seems only reasonable and logical that in an important, complex process like this if some of the parties want more time that we as a government that looks toward co-operation would give them more time.

• (1430)

[Translation]

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is for the Minister of Human Resources Development. Given the gap that he is trying to hide between the positions of his government, of certain provinces and of Quebec, does the Minister, following the cancellation—and it is quite something

Oral Questions

to cancel a federal-provincial conference at the last minute; conference goes have seldom seen that happen—promise to review his proposed reform of social programs to make this reform meet the traditional aspirations and demands of Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, this hon. member should take a look at a few books dealing with federal-provincial relations over the last 120 years. If she thinks this is a great change in precedent, I would suggest that it is quite the opposite. Any federal-provincial meetings must contain a number of adaptations.

By the way, this is not a cancellation, simply a postponement. We have asked our officials to sit down and look at certain areas where they want more time, where we can share more information and that is all.

I suggest to the hon. member that her party's attempts to create some great alarmist crisis out of this event is simply one more effort by them to try to undermine federalism in this country.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

Last week several ministers and provincial counterparts complained that the minister has no interest in genuine consultation as far as social reforms are concerned. They suggested that the minister is trying to ram through his own ideas rather than looking for fresh input.

Does this minister already have a specific proposal in mind to present to the provinces? If so, why is he pretending to seek input through consultation?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, I would be very interested in receiving, and I ask the hon. member to table, exactly what provincial ministers he is quoting. When I received calls from provincial ministers and spoke to them on Friday, no one said we were trying to ram something through.

If the hon. member is going to make charges of that kind, putting words in the mouths of provincial ministers, he owes it to the House to table those reports.

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question.

Is this minister truly committed to working with the provincial ministers on social reform or is this consultation process just a sham?