

*Oral Questions*

particular, tell us now what the revised timetable for his social program reform will be?

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I must say that the Minister of Human Resources Development has done a terrific job and that he has the confidence of all his cabinet colleagues. Never has there been so much consultation on a fundamental reform that will bring about changes in Canada.

Naturally, the Bloc Québécois will promote the status quo. But these changes are under way, and the committee is expected to table its report at three o'clock this afternoon. So, it is a bit much to ask a minister to prepare for such changes before the committee report has even been tabled. To adopt such a stance in this House does not show much respect for the democratic process.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, there certainly is no shortage of consultations. But the minister himself said on television last week that his reform plans had to be delayed because Canada's financial situation makes any real reform of social programs impossible. That is what the minister himself, true to his own way of showing respect for the democratic process in this House, stated outside this House.

Does the Minister of Human Resources Development recognize that social program reform has been cast aside not only because of the budget but mostly because of the Quebec referendum, as the minister knows that his reform will affect thousands of Canadians and Quebecers who are among the most disadvantaged in society?

[English]

**Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is engaging in some very unfortunate speculation.

At no time did I say the reforms were postponed. There may have been a headline writer or two who made that judgment but I certainly did not say it. We said that we had to have the committee report that we will have today. We will examine the recommendations in the report very carefully.

We will begin discussions with the provinces in terms of their putting forward a proper new blueprint and design. There will be a budget which we know will establish a new sense of economic confidence in the integrity of the country. That is the best platform and basis for undertaking social reform.

We will be following our timetable which is to bring in new legislation dealing with social issues this fall. It is exactly the timetable we laid out a year ago and it is a timetable we are still on.

We would only hope that the Bloc Québécois and other members in the House will learn and be willing to participate in what should be and can be one of the most important initiatives in the country.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, my third question is for the Minister of Finance, who will have the final say on social program reform. In that sense, he is the real human resources minister.

Can the Minister of Finance give us the assurance that his next budget will not, once again, target the unemployed, with further cuts in benefits and increasingly restrictive eligibility requirements for UI, as his first budget did?

**Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.):** Following the last budget, Mr. Speaker, more than 438,000 jobs were created in Canada. This is the best performance in a decade. I am quite confident that we will see the same results after the next budget.

**Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

Let me just say quickly that, contrary to what the Minister of Finance just said, it is not 400,000 jobs, but an annual average of 261,000 jobs, a total which has been verified over and over again. Rumours are spreading about the upcoming budget.

• (1425)

It is even being said that a document from the Department of Finance proposes that the federal government completely withdraw from financing some social programs without, of course, transferring to the provinces equivalent financial resources allowing them to take over from the federal government. I remind you that Ottawa has deprived the Quebec government of more than \$12 billion since 1982 by cutting into transfer programs.

Does the Minister of Finance confirm his intention of transferring responsibility for some social programs by putting an end to his financial contribution without full financial compensation for the provinces, which would effectively amount to offloading his deficit onto the provinces once again?

**Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, not only are the figures I just quoted accurate, but I might add that 82,000 jobs were created in Quebec in 1994, the best performance since 1988.

Moreover, am I to understand from the question that the hon. member is in favour of the status quo? We, on the other hand, stand for change and for reform.