

Oral Questions

[Translation]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE REFORM

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

It is not some provincial bureaucrats who made a surprising statement last week but the Minister of Finance himself who suggested that unemployment insurance would be funded only by workers' contributions. Furthermore, the amount of contribution could be set according to each worker's own situation.

My question is this: Is the minister, given his previous answer, prepared to promise that unemployment insurance reform will not make workers the only ones to pay for unemployment insurance?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, we obviously are committed to major reform and improvement of the program.

I must confess to my great disappointment that when I looked at the House of Commons committee report and looked at the special report submitted by the Bloc Québécois, I found absolutely no constructive proposals, no interesting suggestions, no ways of making the reform.

I would suggest if the hon. member wants to make recommendations on how to reform, we are prepared to listen. Certainly, they refused to do it in their committee report.

[Translation]

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier): Mr. Speaker, the mandate of the committee and of minority members on the committee was to consult Canadians and not to submit the opinion of the party.

Will the minister, since he is in charge and he is the one who prepares the action plan which will be known as soon as possible so that everyone can really be consulted, confirm that he is preparing to modify unemployment insurance in such a way that the premium rate will depend on each worker's risk of job loss, so that those who hold insecure jobs will be hit harder?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct one statement by the hon. member which I am sure she made inadvertently.

This proposal for reform is not something I initiate alone. I do it as part of a government, as part of a caucus. We are working with the provinces, business and labour. This will be a point of

view expressed by all Canadians, except for a certain group in the House that does not want to participate in the process.

We have not been able to get this co-operative view as to how we can change the program. As to the specific point raised by the member, I have said to this Parliament many many times that we are engaged in a very open and honest program to ensure that all views are considered. If that is the point of view of the hon. member, I will take that representation. If the Bloc Québécois wants to reduce the premium rate and wants to simply have the employees pay it, that it is not the point of view represented by the minister. It is not the point of view that I share personally. It is a point of view that I will bring to this House as soon as I can and will represent the point of view of all Canadians.

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● (1440)

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, here we are just seven weeks since the budget and today's *Financial Post* paints a vastly different economic climate from what was predicted in the Liberal budget.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Short term interest rates for 1994 are up a full percentage point from February and growth is down. For 1995 it is the same picture, interest rates up and growth down, according to 12 leading Canadian firms.

Using the government's own method of analysis, I wish to ask the following question. We all know the Prime Minister said that he has the people and he has the plan. What is the plan now that his people have been proven wrong?

Hon. Douglas Peters (Secretary of State (International Financial Institutions)): Mr. Speaker, the forecasts mentioned are just some of the ones I would like to mention to the hon. member. The Conference Board's forecast has been revised downward but it is still well above the numbers we used in our very prudent forecast in our budget.

The Royal Bank of Canada last week came out with a brand new forecast. Those numbers show 3.5 per cent real growth this year and 4.3 per cent next year, well above the rates that were used in our budget numbers.

I remind the hon. member that there are some people out there with substantial confidence in the economy and our employment numbers in the last two months show that confidence. The rise in consumer confidence and business confidence is there as well and the private sector forecasts are still well above those used in our budget.

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, I do not know who the hon. minister has been talking to, but if you look at the economic forecasts in the *Financial Post* or you ask