

Oral Questions

We all know that millions of dollars have been spent for this huge consultation operation which was to give the people of Quebec an opportunity to advise the government on the issue of Quebec sovereignty.

With yesterday's announcement by the PQ leader, one week before the tabling of the national commission's report, we have to conclude that for the PQ government and its friends in the Bloc, strategy is more important than the opinion of Quebecers.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[*Translation*]

JOB CREATION

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of Human Resources Development.

In a report released yesterday, the National Council on Welfare reveals that, in 1993, poverty kept on increasing in Canada, especially in Quebec where 20.7 per cent of the population live below the poverty line.

In view of this worsening problem of poverty, how can the government explain that it has not implemented any job creating measure and that it has reduced its participation in the infrastructure program, its only initiative to create jobs since it came to office?

[*English*]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very important for all members of the House to recognize the seriousness of the situation as underlined by the National Council of Welfare report.

The continuing incidence of poverty is something which requires all of us to make a very serious response. The most important is to ensure we can create the right climate, the right framework in which jobs can be created. That is still one of the most effective ways of alleviating poverty, to get people back to work.

In this past year we have created over 450,000 jobs. We have had the highest job growth rate of any industrial country. The figures used by the National Council of Welfare stop at 1993. We would certainly hope the very substantial job creation of this past year would tend to alleviate that problem. However that certainly is no cause for any kind of complacency.

We must redouble our efforts to get people back to work, to invest more in the kind of programs and initiatives that will give people some real opportunity to improve their status. I would welcome the co-operation of the hon. member and his party as we go about trying to reform our social system to enable that to happen.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on numerous occasions, we offered to co-operate with the government to create jobs. It brushed aside all our suggestions.

How can the government claim that it is working to create jobs when it refuses to implement a real defence conversion strategy, to come to the rescue of the MIL Davie shipyard, and decides to stick to a monetary policy obsessed by inflation control instead of job creation?

Will the minister dare say that the laissez-faire attitude of this government will contribute to job creation?

• (1420)

[*English*]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows very well that most of the jobs in the country must be created through the activities of the private sector.

If we are in a situation in which interest rates rise at an unacceptable rate or international capital flows become volatile and we are vulnerable to them, we pay the price by not being able to create incentives for job creation.

That is one of the reasons why in the budget we undertook to stabilize the fiscal situation in the country, to make ourselves less vulnerable to those international flows of capital, to be able to stabilize our interest rates and to provide a very effective framework within which the private sector can go about creating jobs.

At the same time, we also believe to parallel that we must invest very seriously in what we call the human deficit, the issue of making sure people have more choices about improving their skills and being able to get beyond simply benefit programs and into active employment programs.

That has been the whole indication and thrust of the reformed proposals the House of Commons committee considered and the recommendations we are now considering for action which we intend to bring in this year.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, could it be that the minister's passionate plea in favour of job creation by the private sector hides the government's inability to help the unemployed?

Will the minister recognize that the sad picture in Quebec, where 21 per cent of the population now live below the poverty line, the highest rate in Canada, might I add, is the result of federalism and irrefutable proof of the failure of a system totally unable to promote economic development in Quebec and powerless in the face of deepening poverty in Quebec?