

Oral Questions

I want to ask the minister whether this means he still insists on imposing his views on the provinces by making them feel they are up against the wall, since he sent them a 36-hour ultimatum.

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is once again building a question on a strong base of fantasy. Never, in a letter, comment or direction did I say that there would be any limit of 36 hours.

This morning I spoke directly to the chairman of the social services ministers, Dr. James Smith. I asked him where he heard it and he said it was brought up by somebody in the meeting and the press asked about it and he responded. I asked: "Had you heard it from me?" He answered: "No. You are talking about 10 days, two weeks, whatever time is necessary for a response".

I would say to the hon. Leader of the Opposition that before he asks a question he should get his facts straight.

[Translation]

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, in a democracy like ours, the best way to be informed is to read respectable and respected newspapers. The *Ottawa Citizen* said today—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Bouchard: The *Ottawa Citizen* is a very good newspaper. It reported today that provincial ministers were given 36 hours to get back to the minister.

I want to ask the minister whether he realizes that by being so uncompromising and setting this deadline for a quick response from the provinces, he is aggravating the impasse between Ottawa and the provinces.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, I would like to read the press release from the Minister of Health and Social Services: "The ministers have reiterated their commitment to reform of our social programs. They also stressed the need to find more effective ways to implement social programs so as to reduce poverty and improve services to the neediest in our society".

[English]

Mr. Speaker, the ministers of social services understand the priority: get down to work to find new answers to deal with poverty. The only person who is not engaged is the Leader of the Opposition and his party.

[Translation]

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the provincial ministers want social reform, but they

do not want the minister's reform. That is the difference. Does the minister not realize that instead of his usual unhealthy obstinacy, he should show—

• (1420)

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Bouchard: Unhealthy—misguided.

An hon. member: It is a synonym.

Mr. Bouchard: Instead of being so obstinate, would the minister agree he should show some common sense and make a point of not only involving the provinces in his reform but especially of respecting their practically exclusive jurisdiction in this area?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, we have said always that this reform is bigger than any one government, any one level of government. It is a reform that requires the full participation of all Canadians. We will work with anybody: provincial governments, interest groups, Canadians on an individual basis. We did that during the first phase of the Commons hearings and we intend to do it again in the second phase.

I said specifically in the letter I wrote to the ministers of social services—if the hon. Leader of the Opposition would take the time to read the letter and find out what was really said—where I said this must be based on the full participation of all partners in this process. The only people who are avoiding participating are the Bloc Quebecois and we know the reason why.

[Translation]

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development. The *Ottawa Citizen*, referring to off-the-record remarks by a government spokesman, disclosed parts of the social program reform being considered by the federal government, a reform that will be made public at the end of July, during the summer holidays, after Parliament has adjourned.

Can the minister confirm that his reform will require that all income security program recipients, be it welfare or unemployment insurance, will have to do community work or take training courses in order to receive their benefits? The National Anti-Poverty Organization said this will amount to a cheap labour policy, and will not form the basis of a real employment policy.

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, I have not yet had the time or opportunity to read the press report referred to by the hon. member.