

Adjournment Debate

[Translation]

SOCIAL PROGRAM REFORM

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier): Mr. Speaker, in a question I asked in this House on May 25, I mentioned a warning given to the minister in a communications strategy paper whose contents were leaked—there have been other leaks since. This paper referred to “UI cuts seen by the population as evidence that the government wants to fight the deficit on the backs of the poor”.

My question was this: “Under the circumstances, will the minister tell us if the delay in tabling his action plan is the result of a split among cabinet ministers regarding what is at stake?” That was on May 25. This question is still relevant today because, since May 25, we have learned that the minister’s action plan, following which a bill will be drafted and action will be taken, has been postponed until the spring and perhaps until the fall. It will be a discussion paper on which Canadians and Quebecers will be consulted.

The question I asked pointed out that the delay in tabling the action plan was no doubt the result of a split among cabinet ministers. This question is still relevant and I would say that it is even more relevant today. We must keep in mind that the only thing the government has done since the election to help the needy is to cut access and UI benefits except for a small number of cases which, as the minister reminded us today, had positive results.

• (1835)

But for one thousand or so recipients to get enhanced protection at 60 per cent, all other claimants will see their UI benefit rate reduced to 55 per cent. More importantly, there is all those who will no longer qualify for UI, those who will be entitled to fewer weeks of benefits, which means more families and single parents ending up on welfare and increased poverty for children.

We could read in the papers this morning that in Canada, one child out of five is poor and their numbers have increased dramatically since 1989.

I repeat forcefully and will continue to repeat it as long as it takes: apart from talking—it bursts with generous, compassionate words—all the government actually did was to make matters worse on the whole for families and individuals in need.

[English]

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development): Mr. Speaker, I have paid attention to the hon. member’s comments and I can assure her that the expenditures that will take place to engage Canadians in consultations will be expenditures that are necessary to engage them in what we as a government feel is an important dialogue.

There is great support throughout the land for the social security review. People understand that the present programs, although they have served us well in the past and have given us the security we need, are no longer valid for the contemporary reality.

We are going to use this review to engage Canadians. It is not just here in Parliament but it will be in town hall meetings throughout the country. It will be with the parliamentary standing committee. It will be the type of consultation that this country really has not seen to date.

The review is necessary. Canadians need change. We need to give our young people the tools required to compete in a very globally competitive society. We need to adjust our programs to take into consideration the changing configurations of the Canadian economy, the change in our families, the change in our incomes. All the changes that have occurred need to be addressed in a very serious manner.

It is for this reason that the government had the courage to engage in a dialogue with Canadians. We are sure that Canadians, like the hon. member, will be a very effective partner in bringing about positive change to the lives of Canadians.

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Quebec): Mr. Speaker, following the release of the report of the Department of Defence Advisory Council on Women in the Canadian Armed Forces, the media reported that the department had taken specific measures to combat sexual harassment. On May 30, I rose in the House to ask the minister what these measures were and whether there had been an evaluation of the new complaint process.

I have yet to receive a clear and substantial reply from the minister, who had promised something to that effect. Harassment is a problem that affects women throughout the workplace, especially in cases where women constitute a very small minority. I think everyone will agree that the Department of National Defence still fits that category.

All studies have shown that the effects of sexual harassment are many and varied. They may lead to physical discomfort (headaches, fatigue), personal and family problems or problems directly related to the job (unfair evaluation, poor references and, in extreme cases, resignation or release from employment). Linda Geller-Schwarz, who compiled information on sexual harassment in the workplace for the Women’s Bureau, Human Resources Development Canada, wrote:

Harassment is no joke. It upsets the life of the victim, threatens her livelihood, is detrimental to the career of the harasser and poisons the atmosphere at work.

In other words, in the workplace, the emotional and financial cost is often huge for all concerned.