

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite repeated efforts on this side of the House the Bloc still does not understand what accounts receivable are.

In the accounts receivable there are many Canadians who are having difficulty paying on time, but who have made arrangements with the government to pay over a period of time. They owe us money. No question. They pay it back with interest.

Also in that accounts receivable are certain Canadians who dispute tax questions with us. They say we do not owe as much as you say. When we examine their documents we often discover that they are right. I certainly do not think we should be collecting money from Canadians who do not owe it to us.

● (1420)

The accounts receivable are exactly that. We are coming off a bad recessionary period, the Tory recession. We are coming on to the margin recovery. We are doing all we can to help Canadians who are having difficulty and who are now getting back on their feet.

The last thing we are going to do is force them into receivership and bankruptcy by the policies adopted by the Bloc Quebecois.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it may be that I do not understand what an account receivable is at Revenue Canada, but the Auditor General of Canada and I think alike. Neither of us understand. These members do not understand and neither does the public. The minister is the only one to understand.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Gauthier (Roberval): Let me get back to my question to the Minister of Finance, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps I will get a serious answer. Does the Minister of Finance see the commitment his Prime Minister made during the election campaign not to raise taxes for two years, a solemn commitment made to all Canadians, as a commitment that should be honoured? And if so, why does he not come out and say so clearly, today, instead of letting uncertainty hang over the heads of taxpayers?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, more to the point, we have to ask ourselves: is our tax system, here, in Canada, entirely fair? Or does it have loopholes, a point that some of the hon. member's colleagues have already raised? Are there loopholes that should not be looked at?

If, contrary to his colleagues, the hon. member is of the opinion that the system is perfectly fair, that no changes are required, fine, no changes will be made in the next budget, but we think that the system is not entirely fair and that changes will be required. We certainly intend to assume our responsibilities.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was happy to hear the Prime Minister admit that there are tax inequities. This, incidentally, is one of the proposals he will find in the report submitted to him by the Official Opposition, which suggests 10 ways to reduce his deficit problem. I would ask him to read these recommendations, which were tabled in both official languages about two weeks ago. It may be time for him to read them.

In order to meet their commitment to reduce the deficit to 3 per cent of GDP by 1996–97, the Liberal members on the finance committee are proposing higher taxes for all taxpayers through a supposedly temporary surtax. The Official Opposition, however, believes that the deficit can be substantially reduced without raising personal income tax, by making vigorous efforts to collect unpaid taxes and cut spending, including inappropriate tax expenditures.

Instead of raising taxes for all taxpayers, will the Minister of Finance finally decide to fairly and seriously consider all the proposals made by the Official Opposition to help him cut the deficit in an intelligent way?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, yes, I did read the Bloc Quebecois's report. I can assure the hon. member that we tend to consider these recommendations carefully. It should, however, be pointed out to the hon. member that these recommendations would help us with only a tiny portion of the \$42 billion deficit. I would ask the hon. member if he could make suggestions that will really help us solve the deficit problem and the structural problems facing us.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would calmly remind the Minister of Finance that, based on our calculations, which he has not contradicted, our 10-point proposal would amount to about \$15 billion in cuts and savings of all kinds and in new taxes that would make rich Canadians pay their fair share, if they do not already. I would invite him to reassess our proposals.

I put my supplementary question to the Deputy Prime Minister. Does she intend to reprimand her finance minister, as the Prime Minister did yesterday on the issue of high interest rates, so that the finance minister will reject the idea of a surtax that would hit all taxpayers, which would be totally inconsistent with the Prime Minister's own election commitment?