

Oral Questions

[Translation]

TAXATION SYSTEM

Mr. Jacques Tétreault (Laval-Centre): Mr. Speaker, a movement called Alliance for Fiscal Justice was founded in Quebec a few years ago. Among its aims are tax justice and fairness for every individual and family in Quebec, bringing together individuals, couples, families and others who have a common desire for better quality of life and ensuring that everyone can exercise the right to chose the marital status he or she wants to live under, without tax or economic discrimination.

In a recent newsletter, the Alliance asked the following question: "Does the taxation system favour married couples?" The tax record of the past few years indicated that the winning answer is divorce, with the common law relationship where both spouses are working close second. The same study showed that the gap widens every year at the federal level between the various marital statuses.

In closing, the Alliance requests that all taxpayers and all families who have the same income and burden be treated fairly, taking into account their true burden, no matter what their marital status is.

Mr. Speaker, I support these goals and commit to helping to achieve them.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal): Like us, Mr. Speaker, for a good many months the government of Quebec has been urging the federal government to exempt books from the GST. Like ours, their plea fell on deaf ears. Yesterday, realizing that levying a tax on books had been a serious mistake, the government of Quebec revised their position and decided that neither books nor reading materials would be subject to the tax.

Is the Prime Minister now prepared to tell the House that he will follow the example of Quebec, heed the advice of thousands of eastern and western Canadians,

and announce that books will indeed be exempted from the GST?

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

• (1420)

Hon. Marcel Masse (Minister of Communications): With respect to taxation, Mr. Speaker, the government has opted for a wider tax base and a lower tax percentage. The government appreciates the fact that, particularly in recent years, the cultural industry sector generally and its publishing arm specifically have experienced hardships. The Prime Minister has stated that he can understand the problems facing publishers, and the government is prepared to analyze the conditions and respond appropriately as the situation evolves.

Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal): Appropriate measures are needed now, and the minister knows that full well, as does the Prime Minister, I am sure!

[English]

In Vancouver, the Prime Minister said he was reconsidering taxing books like the Bible and the Koran, for example. The television clip tells the story; the Prime Minister may not agree with the TV. I cannot blame him. We cannot blame him because every day we are more concerned about the growing problems of illiteracy, its impact on our economy, on our international competitiveness, as well as the isolation of those who do not yet know how to read.

The Ministers of Finance and Communications have told—

Mr. Speaker: I would ask the hon. member to put her question.

Mrs. Finestone: The ministers have told me that they are looking for alternate ways to finance the book industry, which this minister has just acknowledged, and which also acknowledges that they are gutting the book publishing industry.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member is beginning to make a speech. I would ask her to put the question.

Mrs. Finestone: Will the minister withdraw the tax on reading materials now?

[Translation]

Hon. Marcel Masse (Minister of Communications): Talking about reading materials, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the hon. member for Mount Royal read the