

Oral Questions

opposed to imposing a tax-back scheme on the pensions of the elderly. Is that the position of the Minister of Finance?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, let me make it quite clear to Members opposite—

Some Hon. Members: Please.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre):—that we intend to set out in a very clear way, in papers that will be issued early in the new year, the various options available to us in a limited way. We then want to have an open discussion on these various options to see how we can fulfil the principle that the Prime Minister has just established, that we want to see whether there are ways of maintaining the universality of the programs and direct a greater degree of benefit to those who need it most in our society.

POSSIBLE OPTIONS

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, would the Minister then inform the House whether one of the options that will be considered is that of taxing back the benefits received by old age pensioners in certain income categories, in direct opposition to the position put forward by the Prime Minister yesterday?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, patience is a virtue. The papers will be available early in the new year. I think that if Hon. Members opposite would cease trying to cast fear into the hearts of the people who need help most, and let us get on with the debate we have said is important, it will happen in due course, and I hope that Hon. Members participate fully in that debate.

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UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

REQUEST FOR MINISTERIAL ASSURANCE

Mr. David Dingwall (Cape Breton-East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. I have been informed that during the Christmas recess the Minister, through Order-in-Council, will be making far reaching changes to the Unemployment Insurance Act. I request an undertaking from the Minister that there will be no changes to the Act through Order-in-Council during the Christmas recess. As well, will she undertake to complete the consultation process evidenced in the economic statement of the Minister of Finance, by consulting with labour, business, the provinces, and Members of Parliament?

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure where the Hon. Member has been gathering his information. Certainly not through consultations with me, I can assure you, Sir. I have no intention of making any statement or undertakings by Order-in-Council during the Christmas recess.

WORKING PAPER INQUIRY

Mr. David Dingwall (Cape Breton-East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, will the Minister undertake to provide the working document outlining the details of proposed changes to the Unemployment Insurance Act? Will she be prepared to table that today prior to Members going home for the Christmas break?

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I am still somewhat bewildered by what the Hon. Member is referring to.

Mr. Crosbie: So is he.

Miss MacDonald: There is no document. Perhaps if he would like to speak to me privately to explain what it is he is getting at, we might be able to satisfy his request. I can assure you, Sir, that there is no document that I have yet had a chance to prepare.

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SOCIAL SECURITY

MINISTER'S STATEMENT

Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Minister of Finance. Since he said yesterday outside the House that one option was a tax-back provision, does he not consider that this is a clear contradiction of what the Prime Minister said yesterday within this House?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I characterize that as a clear distortion of what I said outside the House.

GOVERNMENT POSITION

Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, in view of the contradictions from various parts of the Government, is the Minister of Finance in favour of full universal old age pensions and family allowances with no means tests and no specific tax on those programs? Is he also in favour of major tax reform which will help to pay for social programs? Major tax reform?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, what the Hon. Member is trying to do is prejudge the whole consultation process that Canadians want to participate in. I say to her, as I said to her colleague, be patient. The papers will be out shortly and then—

Ms. Mitchell: People are worried. Old age pensioners are worried.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre):—we want to have a full discussion. She says the old age pensioners are worried. They have no reason to be worried, and they would not be worried except for the canards the Hon. Member throws up to cast fear into their minds. There is no reason.