

Oral Questions

absorb those costs or is the Government of Canada going to help them at all to pay their way and heat their way through a cold winter?

Mr. MacEachen: Madam Speaker, I am surprised that the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition would even raise the question of energy prices and their impact upon consumers in Canada. The fact of the matter is that the budget which was introduced on October 28 laid a much lighter burden on the consumers of energy in Canada than that imposed by the budget of his colleague. At the time we were debating the national energy program on the orders of the day, I reminded the Leader of the Opposition of the billions of dollars which were involved in helping the consumer under the present budget in comparison with the former budget, and asked him to keep in mind that we have produced a national energy program which is much lighter and much easier on the consumers of Canada than the budget to which he put his support just a year ago—a very unfortunate date.

Mr. Clark: The reason the minister likes to live in the past is that he knows he cannot go home to live in Cape Breton after the kind of economic policies he has imposed upon the low-income people of that region. He will also know that, in addition to driving jobs and investment out of this country, as his budget and energy policy are doing, this budget provides no help at all to low-income Canadians. There is no equivalent of an energy tax credit, and the minister refuses again today even to acknowledge the problems which will be faced this winter by low-income Canadians who are facing rapidly increasing fuel costs.

● (1420)

Let me turn for a moment to another area where there has been a dramatic increase in costs, and that has to do with the cost of food eaten at home. The cost is up 15.2 per cent over a year ago, largely due to the cost of imported food.

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Clark: Backbenchers opposite shout "order". They do not want to hear the question.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I think yesterday everybody got away with murder, but today we should try to restrict ourselves to short questions and short answers.

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, the people getting away with murder today are members of the Government of Canada who have introduced economic policies which impose serious economic burdens upon low-income Canadians. The people who share the burden of that guilt are all members of Parliament elected as Liberals and who helped the government push that policy through.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I am sorry, but I must ask the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition to ask questions.

Mr. Clark: As I was saying, Madam Speaker, after indicating my view that every person here elected as a Liberal bears

the burden of responsibility for these policies, my question has to do with the statement by the Prime Minister that low-income Canadians should switch their priorities and spend a bit more on food than on other things, which is a statement which will literally force many low-income Canadians into a choice between spending money on food and spending money on fuel.

The minister knows that he has available to him the possibility of a shelter allowance, an energy tax credit—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Clark: The Liberals are trying to shout this down, and so are their colleagues in the NDP.

[*Translation*]

Madam Speaker: Yes, indeed, we have heard interjections from this side, and we have just begun hearing some from that side too. But the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition is not helping anybody with his long preamble. I therefore urge him to put his question.

[*English*]

Mr. Clark: Is the Minister of Finance prepared to introduce a shelter allowance? Is the Minister of Finance prepared to introduce an energy tax credit? Is the Minister of Finance now prepared to remove home heating fuel from his tax package, or does the Minister of Finance intend to leave his budget as it is and to leave low-income Canadians out in the cold without government help to get them through a very difficult economic winter?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: Madam Speaker, the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition has rightly pointed to the situation of low-income Canadians particularly and to how they will be able to manage in the present difficult inflationary situation. That obviously has been a matter of concern to me and to the government. I want to tell the Leader of the Opposition that, as he knows, there are in place at the present time quite a large number of programs which are fully indexed and which will make a major contribution to low-income Canadians who are faced with rising prices.

As he knows, earlier in this Parliament we increased the guaranteed income supplement by \$35 a month.

Mr. Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): That is gone.

● (1425)

An hon. Member: That is all gone.

Mr. MacEachen: Hon. members say that is all gone. That is incorrect; that is wrong; that is false. It is not all gone. It has been fully indexed and its value will not be eroded over time. It will be precisely \$35 in 1980 dollars, protected and indexed against inflation, and hon. members should keep that in mind.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!