

750,000 men, women and children in this country. They were not negotiated as loopholes. They are not diversions for the rich; they are social programs for working people. I want to know, and they want to know, whether the minister is going to revise his budget and make sure that he keeps faith with these plans.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, when the hon. member is contemplating the question of social justice he should ask why it is that he would support the proposition that employer contributions in the hands of a particular group of workers should be taxable, and not in the hands of other groups. That is the question of equity which is raised in the budget, concerning which the hon. member has said very little.

● (1425)

Mr. Crombie: They made agreements.

Mr. MacEachen: Maybe justice is not an important part of his approach to social affairs.

NEGOTIATION OF EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

Hon. David Crombie (Rosedale): Madam Speaker, the question is a clear one, and it ought not to be dealt with simply in that casual fashion. These agreements have already been negotiated, and negotiations are coming up again next spring. Union leaders, in their negotiations, will have to determine whether or not they can negotiate those benefit packages again. The minister owes them an explanation so that they can do their job.

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, is the hon. member saying that any benefit—

Mr. Nielsen: Never mind the rhetoric. Let's have an answer.

Mr. MacEachen:—which is negotiated should not be taxable? Surely wages and salaries are negotiated, and they are taxable. Why is the hon. member drawing that red herring into the discussion?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

ANNOUNCEMENT OF POSSIBLE CHANGES

Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview-Greenwood): Madam Speaker, when one's left wing is not working, one tends to fly around in circles a great deal.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): What part of the chicken are you?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Oral Questions

Mr. Rae: Easy, now! Easy, boys!

My question, which is directed to the Minister of Finance, relates to the speculation about changes in the budget. Over the past couple of weeks the minister has made it clear to the House that he intends to make some changes, and that he intends at least to try to give the House of Commons an opportunity to hear about these changes and to debate them before they are put into effect. Will the minister advise us concerning these changes before Friday and, if not, why not? The implication is that several changes will be taking place throughout the months of December and January when this House will have no opportunity to discuss them.

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I answered that question in response to a question put by the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre. As soon as I have completed the process of hearing representations, giving consideration to the matter and, indeed, discussing any proposals with my colleagues, I will then make an announcement. If the House is here, I will certainly ensure that changes are drawn to the attention of the House.

Mr. Rae: Madam Speaker, the House will be here, but the question is whether we will all be here or whether the minister will be here. That is the problem. The fact is that he did make a commitment over the last couple of weeks that he would bring these matters before the House, but now he seems to be backing away from the commitment. This is yet another retreat by the minister.

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FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS

PROPOSAL TO DROP REVENUE GUARANTEE

Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview-Greenwood): I would like to direct a supplementary question to the Minister of Finance arising from the meetings which he had with the provincial finance ministers on Monday and Tuesday of this week. In view of the figures which were released today by the Conference Board of Canada which show that growth in every one of the provinces will be down and that unemployment will be up, significantly, in all of the provinces, how can the minister possibly carry on with a plan of dropping the revenue guarantee, which will have the effect of reducing the transfer payments and the possibilities of social investment, not only in one part of the country but in every single province of Canada?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, the hon. member is aware that in the proposals I have made to the provinces, I have suggested the dropping of the revenue guarantee. I have also made it clear to the provinces that in no way would the dropping of that particular guarantee have an effect on their capacity to support health services or post-secondary education.