

Oral Questions

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, it will be the first time that this government ever stood up for labour in this country if the Prime Minister says he stands up for the auto workers. I will say that.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, this government is no longer acting like a government. It is once again ignoring its responsibility to ordinary Canadians in order to concentrate on the leadership campaign. There are plenty of crisis situations that require immediate action. For instance, 60 per cent of single parent families led by women are living in poverty.

What is the government going to do for these families? Will they have to wait until the government has time to deal with this problem?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my honourable friend raises an extremely important question. All governments have an obligation to look at lasting solutions, despite an international recession that has affected all western economies, including Great Britain, France, and now Germany.

This is being done by creating new job opportunities, keeping inflation in check—which we have done by lowering interest rates—introducing policies for economic reform, opening up new markets for Canada through the free trade agreement with Mexico, and controlling government spending. These are all policies that were opposed by my NDP friend. Perhaps she would consider changing her position and support government policies that have achieved quite impressive results.

[English]

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

I want to say to the Prime Minister that the issue that has been raised today is a serious one. The primary purpose of Parliament is to hold the government responsible and accountable for its economic policy. It is not a joking matter to suggest the government is not sure whether there will or will not be a budget, whether a Conservative leadership convention takes precedence over a budget.

The Prime Minister has said that there has been no suggestion by the Minister of Finance that the budget, the need to stimulate the economy, the need to create jobs, the need to combat poverty is being held secondary to a Conservative leadership convention.

I want to quote the Minister of Finance from today's *Financial Post*: "Obviously, with the leadership issue, that has to be taken into consideration. There will be a new Prime Minister in June", says Minister of Finance in suggesting he may delay the budget," which is now overdue.

I want to ask the Prime Minister which takes priority, the economy of Canada, creating jobs, combating poverty or playing partisan political games with the lives of Canadians?

• (1435)

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend of course knows the answer to that question, as he would in regard to any political party that had the privilege of forming the Government of Canada.

Leadership conventions will go on from time to time but the primary obligation of Parliament, the primary obligation of the Government of Canada is to look after the national interest.

The Minister of Finance is presently meeting with Canadians across the country. I think he is in Winnipeg later today and then in western Canada after a meeting earlier today in Ottawa. The object of the exercise is to pursue policies that keep inflation down around 1.5 per cent, which is the lowest in 30 years, to keep interest rates down, to stimulate economic growth, to encourage the private sector so that new jobs can be created.

This is the foundation on which we have sought to build growing prosperity and this is the foundation on which we will continue to build.

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance said a week ago that he intended to deliver a tough new budget. Those are the minister's words.

The minister said the budget was required because of a shortfall in revenue projections. The minister also said he wanted to calm jitters in the international financial committee. If those reasons were valid a week ago, one would assume that those reasons are valid today. Will the Prime Minister make a clear statement today, not just for the international community, but for Canadians, that an economic plan is forthcoming. Will he assure Canadians, that the government has its priorities straight by saying to us today that a \$6 billion unnecessary helicopter purchase will be part of that new economic policy and that a budget should be forthcoming any day in this House of Commons?