

With respect to my comments on Friday night, I made the statement, which in the current circumstances is justified, that it was not the intention of the government to launch major new spending programs. I do not believe that statement is in any way contradictory to some of the allegations included in the hon. member's question.

● (1425)

DELAY IN INDEXATION PAYMENTS

Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Madam Speaker, in that statement over the weekend the minister also said that although there would be no new social development programs those now in effect were to be kept at their value by regular indexation. The minister continues to tell us that these benefits are fully indexed. In view of the fact that indexation is always behind, and in view of the fact that those who will receive an increase in July will be getting what was made necessary by the increase in prices in April, and in view of the fact that those who need it most are needing it even more, will the government not do something about this issue on an emergency basis, even if it means overhauling the system of indexation?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I should draw to the attention of the hon. member that, in the very same speech, I talked about the funds which had been allocated by the government in the spending plan over the next several years, which provides for several billions of dollars of increased support in the social development envelope—not \$1 billion but several billions of dollars—so that our expenditures, year by year, are not being decreased. They are not being kept stationary in the social development field, but they are increasing substantially. It seems to me that this is further evidence of the interest of the government in helping those who need help most.

With respect to the question of indexation, we have had a debate on that matter already during the question period. It is my view that there is not a substantial gain to be made by persons in the categories mentioned by the hon. member in adjusting the indexation factor because, in fact, these groups are fully protected against increases in the cost of living. I believe that studies will demonstrate this fact.

Mr. Knowles: Madam Speaker, that is a myth which no one but the Minister of Finance believes. People who are subject to indexation are always behind.

PENSIONS PAID TO WOMEN

Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Does the minister not also realize that these additional dollars which will be put into social development programs make up a total that is a declining proportion of the total expenditures of the government? Is he not also aware of the fact that 61 per cent of the women of Canada who are on pensions are below the poverty line and in a state of degradation? In view of the

Oral Questions

government's protestations all the time that its ministers are interested in people, why do they not do something now, and not three years from now—just before an election—for the women of this country, especially those between the ages of 55 and 65?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I think it is rather inappropriate for the hon. member to ask this government to do something three years down the road—

Mr. Knowles: Do it now.

Mr. MacEachen:—for those who require help, as if nothing has been done in the present session of Parliament. I remember during the last election campaign that it was the leader of this party who raised the question of increased support for recipients of the guaranteed income supplement. Up to that point it had not been mentioned by the leader of the Conservative party. It had not been mentioned up to that point by the Leader of the New Democratic Party.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: It had not been mentioned in the campaign up to that point by the Leader of the New Democratic Party. But when the Prime Minister made a commitment, the Leader of the New Democratic Party chimed in several days later and, in usual fashion, increased the ante.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

* * *

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

ISRAELI ATTACK ON NUCLEAR REACTOR IN IRAQ

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Secretary of State for External Affairs. It concerns the bombing attack on Sunday by Israeli planes on an Iraqi nuclear power plant. Can the minister give us any further details with regard to this very serious matter which could have such an important bearing on peace and security in the Middle East? As well, has the minister conveyed the position of the Canadian government to this Israeli government that we do not in any way condone this act of aggression of one country against another, and that we view the matter with grave concern?

● (1430)

Hon. Mark MacGuigan (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Madam Speaker, I can certainly assure the hon. member that we do not condone this attack, and, indeed, take the most serious view of it. At the moment we have only the bare bones of facts that the attack occurred. We are