

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

EFFECT OF BUDGET ON WORKING POOR

Hon. David Crombie (Rosedale): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. The minister will know that on Monday the Canadian Council on Social Development condemned the government's budget as having, and I use their words, "a devastating effect on millions of disadvantaged Canadians". The Minister of Finance attacked the council, which has served this country for 60 years. They had to come back yesterday with a public statement defending their position and indicating that their concerns needed to be dealt with. In particular, they were concerned about the 500,000 Canadians, the so-called working poor, and I quote their words on page 3.

It is these people, the working poor, who will suffer most from the recent budget.

I should like to ask the minister what she intends to do to offer relief to these people?

● (1140)

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Madam Speaker, it is with regret that I have to make the following remarks on yesterday's press release by, and press conference of, the Canadian Council on Social Development. I say "with regret" because the council has played the role of advocate for the poor in our country which is unique and essential.

However, yesterday the council focused away from the work it did at the beginning of the week and toward the so-called working poor. I have to tell the hon. member that the criticism made by the Minister of Finance and the qualifications I made regarding the council's first document I now have to bring to its second document. The council's table 1, which is called appendix 1, for instance, includes in the incomes of families on welfare the child tax credit and family allowances. They do not include those for working poor families.

I am not saying life is not difficult for the working poor, but I am saying that for a family of four there is an annual, indexed, non-taxable sum of about \$960 missing in each of the tables. This is quite a serious distortion. That is all we are saying. We can only applaud the work the council does in trying to remind all Canadians of the poverty in our society, but serious mistakes were made in that document.

Mr. Crombie: Madam Speaker, I am certain that the minister would not want to mislead the House. The table she refers to clearly differentiates between the working poor who make money as a consequence of low-paying jobs and how much money they get on welfare. The council is dealing with the fact that this budget forces those Canadians onto welfare. That is why the table is there.

There are many other concerns raised in the second report, which is some 14 to 15 pages long. Will the minister meet with the council? The council is supported by her own government. Will she meet with the council and see what she can do to resolve the conflicts among herself, her government and the

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council so that the people who are affected by this budget are aided?

Miss Bégin: Madam Speaker, I think it is a false battle which is being discussed. The council does receive quite an important sum of money from my department; I think the amount is close to half a million dollars. It does its work completely at arm's length from the government, and it must remain that way. There is no doubt that the council's role of advocate is essential, and I will not interfere in its work.

There is no need to point out that we meet regularly. I had meetings very recently with the council. However, I have not had a meeting since the new executive director was appointed, for the obvious reason that I think he is a former employee of my department. I think people have to settle into their jobs and find their style of work, and I respect that.

However, my fights will continue to be with people on this side of the House to make sure that the portion of money going to social development remains the biggest amount spent by this government. I will fight to make sure that it continues to be indexed to the full cost of living. That is my fight, and that is the way I intend to continue my work.

There is no point comparing two kinds of poor. I have, however, said that the council has made a serious mistake in its figures, and that does not help the debate.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

COMPARATIVE COST OF CANADIAN AND UNITED STATES PROGRAMS

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon West): Madam Speaker, I would like to direct my question to the Minister of State for Multiculturalism who is responsible for the co-ordination of the government's advertising program. Figures released indicate per capita government expenditure on advertising in Canada of \$6.66, and the federal government is by far the largest single advertiser in the country, up from seventeenth place in just ten years, with an outlay of three times that of General Foods, the second largest. In view of the comparison with the United States where the federal government is the twenty-eighth largest advertiser, with a per capita expenditure of only 65 cents, can the minister explain the rationale of the government's deeming it necessary to spend ten times per capita the amount spent in the United States for advertising?

Hon. Jim Fleming (Minister of State (Multiculturalism)): Madam Speaker, I believe it is important that the Government of Canada, especially in a country with such a small population and such a large geographic area, communicate.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Fleming: I hear "oh, oh!" from the other side. All I know is that since I assumed these responsibilities I have tried