

Oral Questions

● (1420)

May I add this. I challenge the Leader of the Opposition to present facts which show—and he has all the time in the next six days of debate to prove the fact—that we have laid a greater burden on the Canadian consumer. We lived up to our election promises to reduce that burden and that is why the Leader of the Opposition is so frustrated.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, we accept that challenge.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: We would now like the minister to answer one of the questions which I have put to him—any one. Let us perhaps have him focus particularly on why he has removed the help to low-income and middle-income Canadians that we offered with an energy tax credit. He knows it is not the case that the burden imposed by his increases is much less than that imposed by the budget of my colleague from St. John's West. He knows there will be an unusual burden upon low-income Canadians. Why does he not help them? Why does he not have an energy tax credit, or some other measure, which will offer the same kind of help to those Canadians that he is prepared, with his MURB proposal, to extend to the rich of Canada?

Mr. MacEachen: Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is walking into a trap which he is creating for himself. I want to tell him that the price schedules established for energy—oil and gas—will save consumers over \$40 billion over the same period compared to the December 11 budget. That is \$40 billion better off, which is 12 times better than the amount provided in the energy tax credit. I think the Canadian consumer would prefer that deal to the bad deal which they got last December.

Mr. Clark: We will see.

ENERGY COSTS—ASSISTANCE TO OLD AGE PENSIONERS

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Madam Speaker, what the minister now says will provide precious little consolation and, indeed very little heat to the low-income earners of this country, who will have to pay higher fuel oil prices this winter. I would like to ask the Minister of Finance, who is guilty of the greatest betrayal of the Canadian people, in my view, since that same government reneged on their promise and brought in wage and price controls in 1974.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: On June 17 in this House the Minister of Finance, in reply to the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre, said that whatever tax changes were introduced they would not attempt to solve the economic problems of the country or the fiscal requirements of the government on the backs of the low-income people of this country.

That is precisely what he sets out to do in his budget when he states that the new regime will be phased in, shifting the burden of subsidizing high-priced crude imports from taxpayers to consumers of oil products. I ask the minister what he intends to do for these people this winter, the low-income earners of this country who depend upon oil products to heat their homes, and the old age pensioners who cannot afford to buy them? Does he propose to let them freeze?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): The hon. member is getting overheated on this subject and maybe he ought to go into the cooler for a while and reflect upon the fact that if he is so interested in the low-income people, as I think he is, and as we all are, globally the burden placed upon all consumers in Canada, including low-income people, is \$40 billion less than the burden which he so strongly supported last December. Let him reflect on that fact.

Mr. McGrath: Madam Speaker, what a shameful deception from the minister, who represents in this House low-income earners. What he is saying to the low-income earners of this country is, "Let them drink sherry in the cold." That is the only consolation this minister has.

An hon. Member: Fortified wine.

Mr. McGrath: Or fortified wine. They will need it to keep warm this winter.

● (1425)

Given the fact that those on old age security and the guaranteed income supplement spend a disproportionately high amount of their budgets on food and heating fuel, which will not be covered by indexing, the consumer price index notwithstanding, what measures does the minister intend to announce in the House, before this debate is over and before we vote on the budget, to provide some relief to the low-income earners in this country from rising food prices and rising fuel prices?

Mr. MacEachen: Madam Speaker, I am disappointed that the hon. member has taken a shot at the relief that we have provided for the grape growers and the wine industry in southern Ontario. The hon. member for St. Catharines has been most active in asking me to take this particular action, and I am surprised that the hon. member would differ with his colleague.

However, I repeat again for the benefit of the House and the country that what we have done for all consumers, including low-income consumers in Canada, is reduce the burden by \$40 billion. The burden will be \$40 billion less than the burden which the government he supported placed upon the shoulders of the people of Canada and which we removed by getting re-elected and forming a government in this House.