

Supply

Mr. Reimer: Mr. Speaker, considering the last 15 minutes of the exchange on both sides of the House, I would respectfully request of you, Mr. Speaker, that you rule a little more harshly regarding interruptions on all sides of the House so that we can maintain proper order and decorum and so that the person speaking can say clearly what he or she wants to say. Mr. Speaker, I would appeal to you to do that on all sides of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The point made by the Hon. Member for Kitchener (Mr. Reimer) is well taken. The Hon. Member from Trinity (Miss Nicholson) on debate.

Miss Aileen Nicholson (Trinity): Mr. Speaker, the motion before us is a very simple one and one that I would hope some Hon. Members on the other side may feel able to support. The motion reads:

That this House urges the Government to commit itself now to maintain the present system of full indexation of Old Age Security pensions after January 1, 1986.

I want to approach this discussion, Mr. Speaker, in a non-partisan way because I think the issue is too important to all of us to be accompanied by the kind of acrimony we have heard recently, and I want to propose ways in which I think the Government might quite responsibly reverse its position.

I have some sympathy for budget makers in these difficult times. Canada is recovering from a world-wide recession, but the recovery is fragile and the budget decisions need to be made very wisely; indeed budget makers almost need to be prescient. The cost of servicing the national debt is worrisome and needs to be addressed but, Mr. Speaker, this is not the way.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) yesterday indicated that the plan to remove indexing was tentative and that it may not go ahead. I would ask, if the budget proposal to deindex pensions is to be regarded only as a tentative proposal, why was it presented at all? The usual reason for giving advance warning is, of course, so that people can take measures to protect themselves, but if the indexing is to be reduced as planned, if, over the next five years a couple now aged 70 stands to lose about \$1,500, what can they do with advance warning? Between the ages of 70 and 75, are they likely to be able to go out and find part-time jobs to make up for the income they will lose? They cannot do a thing. That is one of the reasons why this particular measure of deficit cutting offends all of us, that it is attacking a group who are helpless to find other solutions. Advance notice is of no help to them. It only causes anxiety and stress.

If, as the Prime Minister indicated yesterday, cut-backs on old age pensions are not graven in stone, if the cut-backs are not going ahead, then say so now and let the senior citizens relax and enjoy their summer.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss Nicholson (Trinity): If this was meant as a trial balloon, the Government has had its answer. Senior citizens, young people, business, labour have all united to oppose deindexation of senior citizens' pensions.

Clearly the Government received bad advice immediately before the Budget and there is no shame in saying no and in going back to the positions that it took during the last election. In July of last year, the Prime Minister said that he thought full indexation to the full cost of living should be maintained for senior citizens. That was an honourable position, Mr. Speaker, and surely one to which the Government could go back without any loss of face particularly if, as we are told, this proposal was tentative.

In January there were further statements from the Prime Minister which I think he and his supporters might very well want to reconsider. In January the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson), I believe, although I am not quite sure whether this was said by the Minister of Finance or by the Prime Minister, but in any case, in January the Conservative position was that "the Government regards the present system as a good one, which is working well", and that it "is a sound one which should not be disturbed", that "changes in these programs which may result from this review should improve benefits for those in need", and that "savings should not be transferred to deficit reduction".

Again thus was a very good statement of policy made in January by the Government which may very well, on reflection, prove to them a more acceptable policy than the trial balloon we have before us.

May I call it one o'clock and continue after the recess?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It being one o'clock, I do now leave the chair until two o'clock this day.

At 1 p.m. the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

STATEMENTS PURSUANT TO S.O. 21

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

CALL FOR INTRODUCTION OF PROGRAMS

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce-Lachine East): Mr. Speaker, the Government continues to boast of its success with job creation as a result of the marginal improvement in employment during the last two months. We are all pleased with that slight improvement, but it is still too early to tell whether it is the beginning of a real trend or simply an aberration.

Furthermore, the unemployment rate is still at 10.5 per cent. Who can be content with that? Before the recession in 1981, the average unemployment rate was 7.5 per cent, and that was not satisfactory. More important, no one in Govern-