

Oral Questions

PROJECTED COST TO FAMILIES

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I say to the Deputy Prime Minister that we gave the Minister of Finance every opportunity to deny that he was proposing such a tax. We have reminded the Government that a tax on food at current rates of sales tax would amount to an extra \$453 on the yearly grocery bill for an average Canadian family. That is one month of groceries. Is the Deputy Prime Minister suggesting that Canadian families eat only 11 months of the year?

• (1120)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister, and myself have all attempted to clear up the confusion that is being created by the right hon. gentleman and by some of his Members. I repeat what the Minister of Finance said yesterday:

Let me make it absolutely clear. There is no proposal in this document or in any other document in Canada to tax food. That is a fact.

In response to the question posed by the right hon. gentleman, as well as one asked by the Leader of the New Democratic Party who has selectively taken a phrase out of context, I said on September 1, in answer to the Leader of the NDP, as reported at page 8659 of *Hansard*:

The tax reform proposals do not contain any provision for the inclusion of a tax on food.

On August 24, 1987, in response to a question asked by the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre the Prime Minister said:

Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member has just, no doubt inadvertently, misled the House with the direct statement that the Government is considering a sales tax on food. That is false.

I do not know how much clearer one can be. I wish that the Hon. Member would listen carefully to those answers rather than trying to confuse the issue by suggestions which are erroneous.

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT ASSURANCE

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we have listened carefully to what the Deputy Prime Minister has said and to what the Prime Minister has said. But the Minister of Finance refused to close the door yesterday on imposing a tax on food. He said that with all his tax reform proposals he wanted to consult the Canadian people before making any changes.

On Monday, before the committee hearings on the tax reform proposals even started, he issued an eight-page statement of tax changes to those reform proposals without any prior consultation with Canadians. If he can make those changes without consultation, why can he not make the simplest, easiest change of all? Will the Deputy Prime Minister stand up and give us the categorical statement:

“There will not be a tax on food from this Government”? That would be the best three-year anniversary present he could give the Canadian people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance made it very clear yesterday that there is no proposal in this document or in any other document in Canada to tax food. That is a fact. The right hon. gentleman advocates a consumption tax, as does his colleague from Westmount. Perhaps his Members on the Finance Committee are contemplating in the consumption tax the inclusion of a tax on food. If that is the case, then we will wait to see where they stand when the report comes out.

I repeat, Mr. Speaker, the tax reform proposals have been referred to a standing committee, and 300 or so briefs have already been submitted. The matter is under consideration. We will be interested to see where his Members stand on the whole issue of tax reform.

[*Translation*]

TAX ON FOOD—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Jean-Claude Malépart (Montreal—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. Mrs. Denis and other senior citizens remember the Minister of Finance stating in this House when the old age pension de-indexation issue was making headlines that all the elderly Canadians he had met were in favour of de-indexation. As we recall, this statement prompted the Prime Minister to apologize publicly.

Here is my question to the Deputy Prime Minister. It says so in so many words in the document, complete with explanations. In consultations on the Blue Paper the Government made commitments to the effect that universality was not debatable. Why does the Deputy Prime Minister or his Conservative Government refuse to promise that their Party will reject any suggestion that bread, milk and butter be taxed? Why not make that commitment? Why maintain that option?

[*English*]

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I simply want to refer the Hon. Member to my previous answer. May I also point out that he has sent a letter to *La Presse* indicating that the Government is advocating a tax on food. That is absolutely false.

[*Translation*]

REQUEST THAT DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PROVIDE CLARIFICATION

Mr. Jean-Claude Malépart (Montreal—Sainte-Marie): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Who in this Party is stupid? The Quebec Conservative caucus got together to study