

Oral Questions

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, we keep hoping that the minister may actually listen, change his mind and help this country to recover.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, last night the Minister of Finance finally admitted that we Canadians are in a recession. What is he going to do to stop this recession?

[*English*]

If he is not prepared to take action to counter it, is he prepared to do the right thing, and stand up and quit as finance minister of this country?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the simple answer to that question is no, I am not.

The hon. member neglects to say that during the six years that this country has been governed by the Progressive Conservative Party, we have had extremely good levels of growth. We have seen 1.6 million jobs created. We have seen Canada number two in the major industrialized countries, just behind Japan in economic growth.

For him to focus on a very narrow period neglects the position that we have attained over the course of the last six years. This is a very difficult period that we are going through. I have always acknowledged that. I predicted that in the budget that I had in February of this year. I do not take any pleasure in seeing those predictions come through, but I think it is important for me, as Minister of Finance, to be forthright and direct with Canadians, and tell them—

Mr. Tobin: But you weren't in the last election. You misled them then, too.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, we are getting some very direct talk over here.

Maybe the hon. member could stand up and ask a question. I would answer that one, too.

The point is that we have been frank. We have said to Canadians what we think is going to happen to the economy. The position that we are saying right now is that we are going through this difficult period, but in the spring of next year we expect to see some recovery back

to the more normal rates of growth in the 3 or 3.5 per cent range.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. For the first time yesterday the Prime Minister admitted that he does not like the GST on books, the Bible, the Koran and other learning materials, and that he was considering re-examining it after it is in place. He admitted that the GST is full of errors. Is the government prepared to remove the GST on books and other learning materials? Does he agree with his Prime Minister?

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, what the Prime Minister is saying is that the government is quite prepared to look at various aspects of the implementation of this tax to see what the impact of the implementation will be. Then we can look to see if any changes are appropriate. That is the same as what happens with any income tax changes. We make changes to the income tax system and watch how they affect the people who are affected by those changes. The same holds true for the goods and services tax as well.

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is to the same minister.

The Ontario Federation of Students just concluded a study which shows definitively that as students, they will have to pay between \$340 and \$725 more per year for items such as books, reading and other learning materials, transport, electricity, lodging and cafeteria services as well.

What is the minister prepared to do to help these students, who are among the poorest of all Canadians, to counteract these extra costs to them?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, those students are living pretty well if they are going to be paying \$725 more. Seven per cent of \$10,000 is \$725. Today, on average, Canadians are paying \$690 of sales tax already. If you apply that again, those figures would suggest that those students are living on \$20,000 a year. I do not know many students who are living on \$20,000 a year.