

Oral Questions

Mr. Mulroney: I feel that there has been no contradiction at all. I appreciate the Right Hon. Leader's concerns. They are legitimate. I feel they have been well answered and completely responded to by the Minister of National Health and Welfare and the Minister of Finance. I feel, as well, that the consultation papers on which we will all have an opportunity to speak shortly, will provide us with a free-wheeling but reasonable atmosphere to discuss programs and solutions for Canadians while maintaining the principles that we have all agreed upon.

OPTIONAL PROPOSALS

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, Ministers have been talking about a cut-off point, and revenue figures of \$26,000 and \$35,000 have been mentioned for the payment of family allowances and old age pensions. Would the Prime Minister not recognize that there are other options for meeting the needs of lower income Canadians than by taking from the existing social programs of middle-income Canadians?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I quite agree, and some of these will be set out in the discussion papers. I do not imagine that anyone has contended, or would contend, that these papers will be perfect. We expect them to be improved upon as a result of suggestions from the Opposition and comments from interested groups in the country. I think that is the way a fruitful and productive dialogue can be undertaken. I thank my right hon. friend for his openness in this regard, and I assure him that all suggestions will be carefully and thoughtfully considered with a view to enhancing the social programs that we now have and trying to get more money into the hands of those in our society who need it the most.

● (1120)

PREPARATION OF DISCUSSION PAPERS

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, despite the denial by the Minister of Finance, I suspect that there will be some rewriting of the directional papers, or white papers, on family allowances and old age pensions as a result of questions and remarks in the House.

When those papers are being rewritten, will the Prime Minister or his Ministers be consulting members of his own political Party who, at their last political convention, expressed themselves 92 per cent against increases in universal family allowances, 62 per cent against increasing universal old age pension benefits, and 82 per cent against increasing medicare benefits? Will the Prime Minister be heeding the wish expressed by the majority of his Party at its last political convention, when he rewrites those papers?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, if my right hon. friend goes back to a paper on this issue that was presented by the Hon. John Munro when he was a member of the Government of which my right hon. friend was a member, he will find that he seriously questioned the concept

of universality, as did the Member for Westmount when he was seeking the leadership of that Party. He did so very directly, and in fact shot it down and said that he would scrap it and try to introduce a negative income tax.

My right hon. friend said the other day on CTV that he was in favour of universality for now. We are saying that, indeed, there is room for improvement. The papers are in the process of being concluded. When the documents are brought forward they will be consistent with the fundamentals to which we have always adhered.

I have stipulated that this Party stands, as it has always stood, for the maintenance of universal programs on the one hand, that we are opposed to a means test and that there will be no means test. We are trying to develop, with your help, a formula which will allow us in an acceptable way to perhaps take some funds from other sources in the system and elsewhere, and place them into the hands—

Mr. Nunziata: From what sources?

Mr. Mulroney: The friend of yours who is making \$500,000 a year. He does not need the money to the extent that a single mother who is living under the poverty line needs it. We are trying to help them. With your help, maybe we can succeed. That is what it is all about.

REVIEW OF PROGRAMS

Hon. Douglas C. Frith (Sudbury): Mr. Speaker, with respect to this whole debate on universality, I can say that the Government has finally been able to square its own circle. Not only has it managed to confuse the Canadian public, it has confused the minds of its own Government backbenchers who no longer even know the direction the Government wants to take on this issue.

My question is directed to the Prime Minister. When the Government completes its review of old age pensions and family allowances, will he guarantee to the House today that the disposable income for middle income families in Canada will not be decreased?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I think that question has been adequately and thoroughly considered in the House. I can tell my hon. friend not to be surprised if government Members speak up and ask questions, because they are independent, able people, who will speak their minds, as opposed to Liberal backbenchers who simply follow their Leader at all times.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Frith: All I can say is that Erik Nielsen must have had a change of heart.

REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE REFERRAL

Hon. Douglas C. Frith (Sudbury): Will the Prime Minister guarantee to the House today that when the rewritten direc-