

Oral Questions

The Minister of Human Resources Development has indicated that the major focus of his action plan will be child poverty. Can the Minister of Finance explain how the government can help anyone out of poverty when it is mortgaging our future by running up the deficit to the tune of \$1,500 for every man, for every woman and for every child in the country?

Your deficit spending is adding to their poverty, not solving it.

The Speaker: I know it is a small oversight but please address the Chair.

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): Mr. Speaker, the nature of the problems facing the country is in no doubt because of the very large financial deficit. This country is heavily indebted and we have to take grips with it. We did so in stage one, which was the last budget. We intend to do so very clearly in stage two, which is going to be the next budget.

The member opposite raises the question of child poverty. It is quite ironic that question is coming from a member of the Reform Party, which is prepared to acknowledge, as we do the very severe financial deficit in the country, but it has never once acknowledged the very severe human deficit which we in this side of the House intend to address.

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[Translation]

REGISTERED RETIREMENT SAVINGS PLANS

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot): Mr. Speaker, in an interview shown on the "Téléjournal" on October 1, 1993, the Prime Minister promised not to raise taxes during the first two years of a Liberal government. The Minister of Finance, for his part, said yesterday that no option or suggestion should be ruled out in the pre-budget consultation process, including that of taxing RRSPs.

My question is for the Minister of Finance. How can the Minister of Finance leave the door open to taxing RRSPs, when the Prime Minister, his Prime Minister, promised during the election campaign not to raise taxes in the first two years of Liberal rule?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): Mr. Speaker, what the Prime Minister said is that the tax burden of Canadians must not be increased. Besides, we stated very clearly in the red book that ultimately—that is one of the reasons we must reduce the deficit—any government has a responsibility to lower the level of taxation.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance should read again the newspaper article in which the Prime Minister clearly said that taxes would not be raised in the first two years of a Liberal government. Not the tax burden but taxes themselves.

Does the Minister of Finance not think that he would be acting more responsibly if, instead of penalizing taxpayers by taxing RRSPs, he made a commitment right now in this House to reduce the Liberal government's huge operating expenditures and to make his friends, the friends of the wealthiest Canadians, pay by eliminating the tax loopholes they enjoy?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had read the last budget, he would have seen that we eliminated many tax loopholes, like the \$100,000 capital gains exemption. We certainly eliminated corporate tax loopholes. Had he read the budget, he would have seen that we took very significant measures in the last budget and we intend to do the same thing in the next budget.

I hope that the hon. member—and I urge him to do so—will offer us constructive suggestions during sittings of the finance committee.

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● (1425)

[English]

RIGHTS OF MEMBERS

Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, you will know that one of the most ancient and most basic rights of Parliament is the right of free speech. Furthermore we practise this extensively to the point of tolerating 54 members of Parliament who use it for the primary purpose of breaking up the country.

According to press reports it is now the policy of the government that this right cannot be exercised when it involves government members whose moral and religious views may conflict with government policy.

Can the government categorically deny these reports and assure the House that government members, and all members, have the right to object to government policy on moral and religious bases in the House and outside of the House, whether those views are the same as those of the Minister of Justice or not?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, bearing in mind the resolutions that emanated from the table of the Reform Party conference coming up, I think the member would be well advised to look after the affairs of his own party as compared to the affairs of the Government of Canada.