

Oral Questions

For example, in 1971, they were 22.75 per cent below the poverty line, yet for 1980 they were 21.32 per cent below the poverty line, in a period when indexing was in place. Given the budget which calls for a 22 per cent increase in energy prices, which includes fuel oil, and for a 12 per cent increase in food prices, it is obvious that indexing will not even bring the poor and elderly of this country up to the poverty level.

My question to the minister is this. In face of the budget presented by her colleague, what does she propose to do, given her statutory responsibility, to protect the poor and elderly of this country?

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Madam Speaker, the hon. member just played a dangerous game by again quoting statistics absolutely out of context and without any particular reference, thus not permitting me to understand exactly what he is talking about. I repeat that the first responsibility for a minister in charge of social security and social affairs is to make sure that we are fighting poverty and getting people out of it altogether. The best mechanism of protection—and we reassessed it in the discussions that led to this budget—is to keep the full indexation to the cost of living the way we have it in Canada.

• (1430)

I resented what the hon. member said yesterday because it does create panic among people who do not have access to a copy of this budget. The hon. member quoted from the top of page 2 of the CCSD document, which says that no program exists to counter-attack the increased cost of living. There is such a program; it is the GIS. I have the statistics here from Statistics Canada. I said that 20 per cent of Canadians were living in poverty and that percentage had dropped to 12 per cent. The figure was 11.2 per cent in 1978, and that figure will continue to decrease.

Mr. McGrath: Madam Speaker, it is the minister who is playing games by shamefully misleading this House and the Canadian public. I would say that that is not in keeping with the social responsibilities of the minister's portfolio. I have demonstrated, and I stand by my facts, that the elderly of this country who are forced to live on the old age pension and the guaranteed income supplement have consistently fallen behind since 1971, indexing notwithstanding. Now we are facing energy increases which will increase the price of fuel oil by at least 75 cents a gallon. We know the price of food will go up yet the minister has the gall to stand in her place and say I am playing games. What is she going to do about it?

Miss Bégin: Madam Speaker, I am very pleased that we did not live through a full mandate of a Conservative government and its social policy.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss Bégin: I wish we knew what the former minister responsible for pensions meant in September a year ago when he announced in Montreal that old age pensions would be changed and the GIS might be changed as well. That is what I

call a destabilizing factor for the elderly. The CCSD report says that as a result of the budget many seniors may be forced to move into high-cost public and private institutions. This is false. It is not true that people—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Miss Bégin: I am sorry, but hon. members must listen to facts if they want to help those most in need.

Mr. Clark: Do you believe anyone but yourself?

Miss Bégin: It is true that if we keep indexation to the exact cost of living, inclusive of the energy factor, as we do in Canada, the help people receive will reflect the cost of living and that will permit people to stay in their own homes.

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HOUSING**ASSISTANCE TO MEET HIGH INTEREST COSTS**

Hon. John C. Crosbie (St. John's West): Madam Speaker, I would like to remind that minister that had we still been in office, the people of Canada would be getting an energy tax allowance.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Crosbie: Hon. members opposite hate to hear the truth.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Crosbie: My question is for the minister of uneasy projections, the Minister of Finance. The minister will be aware that the Bank of Canada rate went up .40 per cent; the prime bank rate is up .5 per cent to 13.25 per cent and now the bank mortgage rates are ranging from 14.75 per cent to 15.25 per cent. This is a very heavy expense for home owners and those who want to buy homes in this country.

Will the minister tell the House what programs he will introduce to help these home owners or would-be home owners meet these high interest costs, which are forecast, I might remind him, to go up in excess of 18 per cent during the coming year?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I think I dealt with that question yesterday when I advised the hon. member that it was not my intention to renew or bring in the mortgage deductibility program which he had brought forward. One of the reasons which led me to reach that conclusion is that his program, as it was designed, would have benefited only 10 per cent of the low-income families, which he and his party have suddenly discovered but forgot about when they designed this program last year.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!