

Mr. MacEachen: It is fully indexed. It increases and maintains its real value in line with changes in the cost of living. That the value has eroded is one of the biggest falsehoods which has been put forward in the House of Commons. The guaranteed income supplement maintains its real value.

I want to tell the hon. member that I do not intend to take guidance, as he has suggested, from the message given last night by the President of the United States in terms of the reduction of expenditures. Shall I take guidance and reduce spending on the arts and humanities? Shall I take guidance and reduce expenditures on welfare, as the hon. member suggests? Shall I take guidance and reduce expenditures on meal aid subsidies to schools by a billion and a half? Shall I take guidance and cut medicare by a very substantial amount? That is the kind of guidance I am not taking from the Leader of the Opposition, from the hon. member for St. John's West, or from the President of the United States.

● (1425)

Mr. Clark: Tell us about the meals you have cut out, Jean.

* * *

THE MINISTRY

RESPONSIBILITIES OF INDIVIDUAL MINISTERS

Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview-Greenwood): My question, Madam Speaker, is for the Deputy Prime Minister. I would have thought one Regan was bad enough for this government without their having to choose to follow another one.

My question has to do with the announcement yesterday by the Solicitor General that the Prime Minister has appointed ministers to be responsible for constituencies throughout Canada including those not chosen by the people of Canada. When was the Solicitor General appointed as minister responsible for the riding of Broadview-Greenwood, and other ridings which he did not mention? What is the exact nature of his duties, and could the Deputy Prime Minister tell us what ridings he is responsible for now?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): First of all, Madam Speaker, I want to assure the hon. member that the Government of Canada does not believe that any minister has been given responsibility for representing, in this House of Commons, any riding other than the riding for which he has been elected. That is the view of the Government of Canada.

What I would like to tell the hon. member is that ministers for various regions of the country have special responsibilities within the cabinet for representing the interests of those regions.

An hon. Member: Handing out cheques is a tough job.

Mr. MacEachen: For example, for almost 17 years now I have had a special responsibility within the cabinet for representing the interests of my region, namely, the province of

Nova Scotia. That is not to say that I usurp the rights of any other Member of Parliament from that province. The fact of the matter is that other Members of Parliament are not present at the cabinet table to represent the interests of their particular regions, and that is precisely the role that ministers in the Government of Canada perform as regional ministers. I believe it is an essential role, time honoured, and ought to be appreciated by members of this House.

Mr. Rae: Madam Speaker, what unmitigated nonsense from the Minister of Finance. It is totally contrary to the patronizing drivel we heard yesterday from the Solicitor General, and the Minister of Finance knows perfectly well that you do not have to be represented at the cabinet table in order to hand out cheques and to indicate to the constituents of a particular riding that a minister has been named responsible for that riding. Those are precisely the words the Solicitor General used in his letter to my constituents—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I would urge the hon. member to put his question.

Mr. Rae: Those are precisely the words that he used yesterday in the House. The Deputy Prime Minister did not answer the first question. What are the duties as described by the Solicitor General yesterday, who is carrying out those duties, and will you table a list of ministers who are responsible for particular constituencies, as indicated yesterday by the Solicitor General?

● (1430)

Mr. MacEachen: Madam Speaker, I did answer the question.

An hon. Member: You did not answer it.

Mr. Crosbie: Slippery shoes!

Mr. MacEachen: As I understand it, it was a follow-up to the question of privilege which was raised yesterday to the effect that in some way ministers of the Crown were supplanting the proper role of Members of Parliament in the House of Commons.

Mr. Rae: Exactly.

An hon. Member: Now you are getting the point.

Mr. MacEachen: That is the question that I am answering, and the hon. member has agreed that it is the question. I am telling him that it is not the policy of the Government of Canada to usurp in any way the proper role of Members of Parliament in representing their constituencies in the House of Commons. Not at all. I would be the first to object to that procedure, but I think it is essential, in our system of government, that ministers be given responsibilities for representing in a special way the interests of their regions in the cabinet and around the cabinet table. That has been the tradition, and it is simply that tradition that is reflected in my answer and the responsibilities which the Solicitor General is carrying.