

Oral Questions

dialogue is such a novel exercise for you that you do not accept it. We are seeking your co-operation, a national dialogue, so as to be able to give Canadians as much money as we can in the most productive manner possible.

[English]

MIDDLE-INCOME SOCIAL PROGRAMS—STATEMENT
ATTRIBUTED TO MINISTER

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, my question is also directed to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister now knows that the interview which is being discussed here during Question Period is a taped interview. The Minister of Finance was heard to say quite clearly that middle-income social programs cannot be afforded today. Is the Prime Minister saying that the Minister of Finance is wrong?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): I am saying that the Minister of Finance, as my hon. friend has done from time to time, introduced subjects to invite debate and discussion. That is the object of the entire exercise.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mulroney: We have entered into this debate with open minds and with honest positions. We are trying to seek participation from my hon. friend. I hope there will be no disagreement from my hon. friend, who blinks and nods so disapprovingly—

Mr. Deans: Because you are not telling the truth.

Mr. Mulroney:—that, when we have inherited an almost bankrupt situation, we have a moral imperative to try to provide help to those in Canada who need it most, the widows, the dispossessed, and the underprivileged. And we are going to do it with or without your help. That is what we are going to do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Could we return to the idea that we listen to questions and listen to answers civilly on both sides of the House, please.

GOVERNMENT POLICY

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to the Prime Minister, notwithstanding all of his idle, useless rhetoric. Given that the statement of the Minister of Finance is absolutely clear, is the Prime Minister saying now that the Minister of Finance is wrong in his statement that the Government of Canada, and the people of Canada, cannot afford to continue with the social programs which are presently in place for those who are deemed to be middle-income Canadians?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): I am not saying that the Minister of Finance is wrong. I am saying that,

as usual, the Hon. Member chooses to place a wrong interpretation on what the Minister of Finance said.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mulroney: You have made a career out of it. You should change.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Fort Garry.

Mr. Deans: Some day we will have a real debate.

Mr. Mulroney: You won't be there.

Mr. Deans: Then you pick the place.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

● (1140)

AFFORDABILITY OF UNIVERSAL PROGRAMS

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg-Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I think the Prime Minister recognizes by this time that this is a matter of great seriousness. There are a number of people, not only in the Chamber but throughout the country, who want some answers to this very important issue. You say that the Government is interested in those in need. I presume that includes women who, even though they may be in a middle income family, receive family allowance and need it to supply certain provisions for their children. The same is true with senior citizens.

We are talking about the Minister of Finance who is the senior economic Minister in the Government. He has said that these programs can no longer be afforded. Is that a clear statement on behalf of the Minister of Finance, representing the Government, that the Government no longer believes that we can afford universal programs for those in middle and upper middle income categories?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, when I came into the House a year ago I was warned to pay particular attention to the Member for Winnipeg-Fort Garry when he was maudlin. This is the case today. You have wilfully distorted a position of the Minister of Finance. I think it is unbecoming that on a matter so sensitive and so important you would attempt to sow fear and concern among Canadians when you know full well, because of the repeated statements of the Government and the Prime Minister of Canada, that our only intention in initiating this debate is an attempt to help those in our society who need it most, including the people to whom you refer.

As proof of our bona fide, notwithstanding the horrendous economic situation that we inherited, we provided more money to widows and to veterans who defended Canada and who needed it. That is the object of the entire exercise.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Axworthy: Mr. Speaker, I think the Canadian people will judge who is being maudlin at this point in time.