

Oral Questions

Mr. Mulroney: Since we have come into office, notwithstanding the fact that the budget deficit was greatly in excess of the deficit projected in the February papers, we have taken a number of measures designed to benefit those in need both in November, and again in December, with regard to veterans, the elderly, and others. We will continue to do so.

I will acknowledge that unfortunately, given the incredible mess that we were left, we cannot do it all over night, but we are working on a program which will allow us at all times to provide more to those in our society who need help.

REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, the reality remains that the Prime Minister has categorically broken a very specific promise he made to the pensioners of Canada, who are among the most vulnerable people in our society.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1440)

Mr. Broadbent: When his Party was in opposition it took out full-page ads across the country and spent some \$30,000 to criticize what was then alleged to be the Liberal Government's intention to remove indexation of pensions, correctly pointing out how harmful that would be to Canada's elderly citizens, and urging Canadians to send a message to the Government to stop it from doing so. Since Canadians were urged to send a message to the Government of the day to get it to reconsider, will the Prime Minister now make a commitment to Canadian pensioners that, if they get a message to him that they want indexation restored to their pensions, his Government will reconsider?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I think the Hon. Member does a disservice to the House when he compares the 1981 period with the position of the economy today. It is quite clear, and this is my recollection, that at that time the inflation rate was 11 per cent or 12 per cent. That was entirely different from today, when we are looking at an inflation rate of 4 per cent. At that time there would have been a major impact on Canadians had there been a removal of indexation, as was speculated at that time. However, at this point there is a very potent form of insurance for Canadians receiving any form of indexation program, because they will be protected from any inflation rate over 3 per cent.

REQUEST THAT PENSIONERS BE CONSULTED

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, the only guarantee in the Budget for pensioners is that within five years they will lose \$600 from their pensions, and that within 15 years they will lose \$1,500 from their pensions. That is the guarantee they are getting from the Conservatives.

Considering that the Minister's Government has made so much about consultation, even though it left out anything it heard from pensioners, will he now consult pensioners about

the effects of the Budget and, if they tell him that they want their full pensions restored, will he have the honesty, in terms of previous commitments, to live up to that request?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, we can see in the House today that there are many Conservatives Members who have been consulting over the past few days. The response to the Budget has been a positive one. Our senior citizens are saying: "Yes, we know there will be some"—

Mr. Fulton: Name one senior citizen who supports it.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): If the Hon. Member would allow me to finish the question, I would do so.

An Hon. Member: George Hees.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Senior citizens are saying: "Yes, there will be a small sacrifice which we, as all Canadians, are being asked to accept, but we want to do so because we are worried about our grandchildren, because we are worried about that fast accumulating debt which is such a burden on the country". Those are the reasons why senior citizens are saying: "You are on the right track".

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THE ADMINISTRATION

SOLICITOR GENERAL'S CONDUCT—REQUEST FOR REPLACEMENT

Hon. Bob Kaplan (York Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. When the Prime Minister smeared me yesterday with a patently false accusation, which he has subsequently withdrawn, he was trying to protect a Solicitor General with a perverse sense of how he should use his powers. I want to return to that and to ask the Prime Minister how he can keep in Cabinet a Solicitor General who gratuitously intervened, taking sides in a proceeding before a federal commission, to protect a friend. Does the Prime Minister not realize that that sends an intimidating signal to complainants before the federal tribunals and commissions? Is it not a ground for replacing the Solicitor General with someone who has respect for the office?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I have learned that in the heat of debate in the House from time to time statements are made which inadvertently reflect unfairly on other Members. That was the case with part of my statement yesterday *vis-à-vis* the Hon. Member. I wrote to him earlier today to withdraw that statement, and I do so with good grace, and with an apology to him.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mulroney: I read the transcript of the statement made by the Solicitor General. It is my reading of it, and my understanding, that he expressed to the media at that particular moment regret that his remarks had been so construed. He