

Oral Questions

Mr. Clark: Now, this budget, which is described by his colleagues as seriously flawed, has already been changed in several instances by the minister. Will he tell us whether it is his intention to announce any other changes in the budget?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I have said repeatedly in the House of Commons that I would be listening to representations from interested groups—

Mr. Broadbent: Ask the Solicitor General.

Mr. MacEachen:—and obviously when the bills are before the House we will be giving them a searching examination, and if improvements or changes are justified I have assured hon. members that I will be listening very carefully and will be prepared to make those changes. I have no changes in mind at the present time, but if, before that process takes place, particular changes are necessary, then of course I will make them.

The Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition knows that on December 18, in response to public representations, I did make considerable changes which were justified, and I make no apology for those steps because it has always been the duty of the Minister of Finance to make changes following a budget—

Mr. Nielsen: He usually resigns, too.

Mr. MacEachen:—and I do not propose to change that practice.

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LABOUR CONDITIONS

REQUEST FOR PROGRAM TO STIMULATE JOB CREATION

Hon. David Crombie (Rosedale): Madam Speaker, my question is also to the Minister of Finance. The minister is well aware of the startling fact that over a quarter of a million manufacturing jobs have been lost in the last six months alone. The minister must also know, Madam Speaker, that this has had a devastating impact on working people and their families right across this country. Representations have been made to the minister from the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, and hundreds of other local and regional associations, all of them protesting the policies of this government, particularly in relation to their impact on the economy. They all want to know the answer to this question: when will the government begin a program of stimulating job creation in the manufacturing sector of this country?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I am rather interested to see the newly discovered interest of the opposition in the

unemployed. They have been off the job for the past three weeks—

• (1430)

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. MacEachen:—and they totally forgot about the unemployed. I am not very much impressed with their new-found interest expressed today.

Some hon. Members: Right on!

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FINANCE

EFFECT OF BUDGET ON EMPLOYEE HEALTH BENEFITS

Hon. David Crombie (Rosedale): Perhaps, Madam Speaker, the minister may find some new-found interest in another matter.

An hon. Member: Crombie for leader!

Mr. Crombie: The minister may recall that unemployed and employed people in this country will be hurt by the government's plan to tax health and dental benefits for working people. The minister informed the House some time ago that he was studying representations from the Canadian Life Association, the Canadian Labour Congress and others. I have asked the minister on two previous occasions when he was going to make an announcement about changing those things.

An hon. Member: Question!

Mr. Crombie: This is a serious matter, Madam Speaker. It is urgent and important because it affects the health and dental benefits of more than one million Canadian families. They want to know, and we all want to know, when the government will finally make those announcements, make those changes and protect those benefits. Laugh that one off!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, the hon. member tells me that these matters are urgent and important.

Mr. Crombie: Three times we asked you.

Mr. MacEachen: Were they urgent and important to the hon. member, as he stayed out of the House for two weeks—three weeks?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss MacDonald: Why do you not do something today?

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): No answer to the question.