

Oral Questions

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, there is no relentless assault on Canada's social programs.

If the hon. member would state what we stated clearly in the last number of budgets, where we have been cutting spending is to avoid to the maximum extent possible hitting those safety net programs. This year spending in the federal government will go up \$3.2 billion. Three billion dollars of the \$3.2 billion is payments to senior citizens, family allowances, unemployment insurance benefits, veterans pensions and allowances, payments of equalization to low-income provinces, social welfare payments that we share 50-50 with low-income provinces, payments to Indian peoples on health care, education and housing. That demonstrates that we have not changed any of those programs. We are fully committed to those and to suggest otherwise is also a distortion.

Mr. Bob Speller (Haldimand—Norfolk): Mr. Speaker, Canadians do not need the minister's 25 per cent solutions.

I have a supplementary question. The social policy group also correctly pointed out, and I quote: "The federal government has cut billions from social spending and raised billions more through income taxes by partially deindexing the tax system and key social programs". When will the minister resist his impulse to help his Bay Street buddies and start helping some of the hundreds of thousands of Canadians that he has put out of work because of his ill-conceived economic programs?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the preamble to that question is again riddled with distortion. If the hon. member looks at the policies we have been following as a government, he will see that with things such as a refundable sales tax credit, the substantial increase in the child tax credit, and the effects of income tax reform have been designed so that people in upper income tax brackets are paying a greater share of the tax burden of this country, a significantly greater share of the tax burden than was the case when we came into office.

This is a clear indication of our commitment to those social safety net programs and a desire to make those programs work, not have the effect of helping those people in upper income brackets such as the members of the Liberal Party have who have continually opposed the tax-back of the old age security for those who earn more than \$50,000. That is an example of how we are targeting—

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister.

Later today we are going to be discussing national unity and, hopefully, the willingness on the part of this government to listen to what Canadians have to say. I would point out to the Deputy Prime Minister that for fishermen, farmers and working people throughout this country, those hundreds of people who are being laid off every month, the issue of the day is how they are going to make it from day to day, how they are going to continue to raise their families, stay in business and pay their bills.

It has taken years for this government to finally come to the realization that it is important to listen to Canadians. But the 1 million unemployed Canadians do not have the time to wait. So, I ask the Deputy Prime Minister, what about listening to Canadians now, withdraw the GST, listen to Canadians, lower interest rates, listen to Canadians and listen to what Canadians are saying about the economic strategy of this government?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, there is not anyone on this side of the House who is happy about the fact that there are about 1 million people unemployed today. But, I will tell you what we are happy about, the fact that there are more than 1.5 million people who are employed today who were not employed six years ago. That is a measure of the economic programs that we are following.

• (1430)

The Leader of the New Democratic Party says that we should not go ahead with the GST because it will hurt low income people. That is a distortion of the policy of the government, because the GST credit, which is going to be paid by cheque four times a year starting this December, before the GST goes into effect, will offset the impact of sales tax reform so that families who are earning less than \$30,000 will be better off after sales tax reform than is the case today.