

Oral Questions

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): They know the only way you can control the debt is to get the annual deficit down, and yet we have every Member on the other side fighting me every time we try to get the annual deficit down. He is talking out of both sides of his mouth.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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THE BUDGET**SOCIAL POLICY CHANGES**

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): My question is to the Minister of Finance. All Canadians will have noted by now that this Government has begun to completely undermine Canada's social policy tradition. They will not put up with it, I say to the Minister of Finance right now.

Will the Minister confirm in the House that the head of a family today at age 45 with an income of only \$40,000 after 20 years, by the time he or she begins to collect the pension, will have this Government's claw-back provision applied to that pension, will have it hacked away by this Government? If the Minister will admit that this is going to happen to an average head of family today, will he try to justify it to the people of Canada?

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member knows full well the objective of this program, and if I can point out to him—

Mr. Broadbent: We do. That is what is wrong with it.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): I point out to him that the universal character of these programs is absolutely maintained. We are leaving in place the safety net that has been established with these programs. But in order to achieve the over-all objective of this Budget, which is to maintain social programs, we must get a hold on this debt and get it under control. The Hon. Member has said he agrees the deficit is too high, he agrees that we have to get the debt under control. What are his ways of getting the deficit under control?

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, I will be glad to table some day in the House a five-page letter that we sent to the Minister showing him where to get money without taking it from the poor.

• (1430)

TAXATION OF SOCIAL BENEFITS

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, the Minister just said that the universality principle has been maintained. Only a Conservative would claim that when you give a dollar away with one hand and take it back with the other, you are maintaining the universality principle.

Since the justification for hacking away at pensioners above the \$50,000 level is that these pensioners do not need Government pensions, will the Minister answer seriously, if that applies toward taxing back pension benefits today, according to Conservative philosophy, why will it not apply to taxing back medicare benefits tomorrow?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, let me read from the Budget itself because I do not think the Hon. Member has:

The essential purpose of the social safety net is to assist those most in need, not to subsidize those with high incomes.

As I said earlier, we have left in place the universal character of these payments and, to repeat myself, we are doing this so that we can get the size of the interest payments down—

Mr. Broadbent: Swallow your propaganda.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): —so that we can maintain the social programs, programs that both he and we are committed to, like medicare to which he just referred. That is the objective of this. If the Hon. Member does not understand—

Mr. Broadbent: I understand what you are up to. I understand very well.

Mr. Wilson Etobicoke Centre): —the impact of debt and the impact of interest costs, probably it is a good time for him to leave the House of Commons so that he can go back to school and learn more about it.

UNIVERSALITY OF MEDICARE

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, the Minister feels more comfortable attacking pensioners than medicare, for some strange reason. I would like him to deal with the question. The Prime Minister, in the House yesterday and again on Friday, and the Minister himself in different circumstances justified whittling away at pensions because, he said, upper-income Canadians do not need them. If that reasoning holds today for those Conservatives, it does not hold for us, how are Canadians protected from the same Conservatives applying that principle to medicare tomorrow? I want to hear the answer to that.