

4 mandate to come good to the Canadian public with his actual intentions?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I think I have already answered that. I know that my hon. friend would not disagree with me when I say that the Minister of Finance is well known as a man of tremendous integrity and honesty. He speaks the truth at all times. He consults openly and widely, and I know that my hon. friend will want to applaud that statement because it is absolutely true.

[Translation]

REQUEST THAT GOVERNMENT DEFINE "AVERAGE INCOME"

Mr. Raymond Garneau (Laval-des-Rapides): Mr. Speaker, I am sure you will agree that clarifying the statements of the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister is no easy task. In a press interview, and I have the transcript by the way, the Minister of Finance said that social programs, and specifically family allowance and old age security pensions, would have to be cut because the Government no longer could afford them. According to the tax figures published in 1983, only 9.1 per cent of personal income tax returns declared incomes above \$35,000. I would therefore ask the Prime Minister for the Government's definition of an average income. Is it \$35,000, \$34,000, \$25,000, \$40,000? Could he inform the House of this definition, so that people will not panic because of these family allowance cuts?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I feel that the Minister of Finance was trying to open up a dialogue and debate on this important issue, and I am referring to the sensible utilization of the public funds at our disposal, for the benefit of the neediest in our society. I think I must congratulate my hon. friend who, after listening to the Minister of Finance on November 8, applauded his courage, since basically, he agreed with his message. I want to congratulate him because he was quite right to do so.

Mr. Garneau: Mr. Speaker, for someone who has just accused my colleague of reading only part of the statements, the Right Hon. Prime Minister is not doing very well. He should have read the rest of my remarks.

The purpose of my question is to prevent any misunderstanding, since there are people among the general public who are wondering whether they are going to lose their family allowance or their old age security pensions. Mr. Speaker, 9.1 per cent of Canadian taxpayers have incomes over \$35,000. Could the Prime Minister inform the House at what level old age security pensions and family allowance will be cut off and how his Government is going to establish that level? Are we going to have an army of investigators? How is it going to work?

Oral Questions

Mr. Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, first of all, my hon. friend's question ignores the context of the statements made by the Minister of Finance. There will be a dialogue, and I hope it will be a two-way street.

Proposals and study documents will be tabled in the House and there will be discussions at the national level. What we are trying to do, and perhaps we are too optimistic, is to see whether we can obtain the objective participation of Opposition Members. We know we are going to get that participation from Canadians in April, which will help us make value judgments on very important issues, on what to do about an economy that was left in a terrible state, where we have a large number of our fellow citizens who urgently need public funds, those who are the neediest in our society. We want to help them instead of bank presidents earning \$500,000 per year. That is what we want to do.

● (1125)

[English]

Mr. Speaker: I rise with great respect. Order, please.

UNIVERSALITY—PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT

Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. Does he still stand by the statement which he made on March 7 when he said: "We are not going to tolerate distortions of our position. We are in favour of universality of social programs and it shall not be touched"?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I stand by that position.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Mitchell: I hope, in saying that, the Prime Minister realizes that universality means that benefits go to all Canadians.

STATEMENT ATTRIBUTED TO MINISTER OF FINANCE

Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, is the Prime Minister aware that in a taped interview yesterday the Minister of Finance said: "Upper and middle income social programs cannot be afforded today"? Does this reflect the Prime Minister's position and the Government's position on universality?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): No, Mr. Speaker.

REQUEST FOR REFORM OF TAX SYSTEM

Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the Prime Minister is refuting what the Minister of Finance said. Why does the Prime Minister not stop