

● (1125)

THE ECONOMY

PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY

Mr. Terry Sargeant (Selkirk-Interlake): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance. It follows on questions posed by the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain in the last couple of days. The Minister of late has been travelling across the land touting the recovery which he sees as presently being under way. In some big business sectors, it no doubt exists. Yet today there are more than four million Canadians living in poverty, 900,000 more than there were two years ago. What does the Minister see in this much ballyhooed recovery for these four million and more poor people?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, if the Hon. Member looks at the statistics for 1983 he will find that once again real wages, that is, wages after inflation and taxes, will have grown for workers in our country. Also he will find that, despite the fact we had a very deep recession and had to cut in a number of areas, we have maintained support for full indexation of the transfer payments for those who are really in need, the poor, in spite of the fact that we were asking others in the community to accept limitations on their wage increases or on the prices they wanted to charge.

I have indicated that, as resources become available, as far as the Government is concerned we would try to direct those resources toward helping those most in need. The Hon. Member knows that in the Speech from the Throne, for instance, the Government committed itself to trying to find ways of further increasing the support for single persons on the Guaranteed Income Supplement, so as to try to bring them at least above the level of poverty.

These are the measures the Government has taken and has announced in the past. When the Government is ready to proceed with those measures, I hope they will have the support of the Hon. Member.

Mr. Sargeant: Increases in real wages are only good for those people who are getting wages.

REQUEST THAT BUDGET ASSIST PEOPLE WITHOUT UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE BENEFITS

Mr. Terry Sargeant (Selkirk-Interlake): Mr. Speaker, the Minister speaks again of the safety nets which are in place. Yesterday in the House the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain made the case to the Minister that one of those safety nets, unemployment insurance, has loopholes so big that 25 per cent of those in need have fallen through the net. If the Minister would care to come to my constituency, I could introduce him to many such people. Will he assure the House that his Budget due in just a few weeks will patch up those loopholes, offering some hope and some income to those who are now ineligible for unemployment insurance?

Oral Questions

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I do not need to visit the Hon. Member's constituency to know about such situations. I have some in my own constituency, and I meet such people on a regular basis. I will take the Hon. Member's views as representations.

PLIGHT OF UNEMPLOYED

Mr. Terry Sargeant (Selkirk-Interlake): Mr. Speaker, I will put my final question in very simple language. What does the Minister propose to do for all those Canadians who are presently without jobs, with no prospects of jobs, with no unemployment insurance or any other source of income? What are those people to do?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, it is not what I can do. It is a question of what we can do as a country. As a country we have to work together quite closely—governments, labour, and management—to ensure that we will be more competitive, more productive, and more efficient, and that we will meet and beat tough competition around the world. If we succeed in doing this, Canada will grow and there will be more jobs for all those who do not have jobs at the present time. This is a collective effort which has to be developed between all economic agents of the country.

I am very happy in that regard to have seen this morning that labour and management—all major unions and major business groups in Canada—have agreed to sit down together to study ways and means of improving the labour market, productivity, and employment growth. They have invited governments to participate in that national effort. It is an important step toward ensuring that the Canadian economy will indeed again be a leading economy in the world.

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● (1130)

NATIONAL REVENUE

INVESTIGATION OF DEPARTMENT'S PRACTICES—REQUEST THAT REPORTS BE MADE PUBLIC

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Yellowhead): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Revenue who has appointed an investigator to look into the Tax Department and periodically give the Minister secret reports. I presume that the Minister has established some schedule for the receipt of these secret reports from the investigator. Will he tell the House of Commons when he expects to receive the secret report on tax collection quotas, when he expects to receive the secret report on the special hit list the Department has established for celebrity taxpayers, and when he expects to receive the secret report on the Government's raid on private bank accounts? Will he also tell the House whether, upon receipt of these secret reports, and in the interest of the House of Commons and the public of Canada in knowing what is going on in the Tax Department, he will agree to publish and table those secret reports immediately?