

any economy to protect consumers against inflation, especially when it comes from abroad. It is a fact of life, and if we tried to protect all Canadians against that type of thing, it would be a real recipe for disaster.

● (1417)

If our Canadian dollar is being judged by the Common Market as being lower, Canadians have to accept that. Because of lack of discipline in the past in the marketplace in Canada, we have to pay that price today. It is quite evident that Canadians have accepted the fact better than the opposition, because they are accepting the compensations which are making Canadian products more competitive. This is why the Canadian balance of payments in trade has improved.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, it really is incredible that even a government led by a Prime Minister who claims that the number of Canadians living below the poverty line is, in fact, lower than he knows it to be, would suggest—

An hon. Member: Oh, come on!

Mr. Clark: It is incredible that a government like that would say—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I can wait them out.

An hon. Member: Let the cows yell.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister deliberately misleads Canadians about the number living below the poverty line.

An hon. Member: He just said the contrary.

Mr. Clark: Now this Minister of Finance tells the poor of Canada that they should simply accept, as a fact of life, that under a Liberal government they will have to suffer. What I want to ask the Minister of Finance, and we have pressed for this several times—

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Clark: I can wait them out, if they continue shouting. I want to ask the Minister of Finance what his excuse is now for failing to bring in a budget that would bring some aid to the Canadians who are being hit the hardest by the increase in the cost of food in this country. Will the minister also tell us whether he is giving any active consideration to changes in the tax structure—a tax structure which is now helping to drive out of production some Canadian farmers whose efficiency has contributed to such reductions in the cost of food as now exist?

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I think the Leader of the Opposition would have been well advised to stick to his text, because he was all over the place in the last question. I said

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that we had an economic statement on October 20 which stated the goals for our economy. We cut taxes by \$3 billion from January 1. I said that I have to wait to see what the results will be on the Canadian economy before I decide to change the economic policy of the government.

I think that in Canada at this time we are experiencing a more stimulative economic policy than any of the developed western nations. The hon. member is very immature, in my judgment, if he does not want to wait until we have the report of the first quarter of 1978 before passing other judgments.

MEASURES TO PROVIDE RELIEF TO LOW INCOME CANADIANS

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the cost of waiting is paid in the form of plants closing down and an increase in the number of low income Canadians who are asked simply to accept as a fact of life that they have to pay more for basics under a Liberal government. I want to know from the Minister of Finance whether the government is now considering measures that will provide relief to low income Canadians who are the most victimized by the economic policies of this government, and whether the government is considering new proposals that could be part of a budget, if the Minister of Finance ever finds the courage to bring one in.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: This could help Canadian farmers whose capacity to continue producing efficiently is being jeopardized by the tax system. Is the government actively considering measures to aid consumers who are being victimized now by very high-cost imported food, and to aid farmers whose capacity to produce food efficiently is being undermined by this government's policies?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. gentleman forgets that in Canada we have programs which are indexed to the inflation rate and that they increase automatically every month or every three months according to the formula adopted by the House.

I do not understand the attitude of the hon. member who is making promises everywhere in Canada about tax cuts amounting to \$2 billion coupled with reduced government spending and who at this very moment in the House of Commons makes other representations which will cost more money to Canadian taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, I think that under the circumstances we have a stimulating policy for the economy. Canadian products are more competitive now that they have ever been in recent years. I think we would rather have a budget in a few weeks or a few months to gain an insight into the situation instead of taking the approach of the government of Ontario which has merely increased taxes instead of lowering them.