

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Madam Speaker, I remind the hon. member that in the preamble to his question he complained about the fall in the average income of families last year. I need not remind him who was in office last year and did nothing about it at that time.

● (1125)

So far as this year is concerned, and referring to the specific question raised by the hon. member, indeed we are quite ready to share in a joint program with the government of Ontario. As a matter of fact, we are quite ready to share with the governments of all the provinces. Not only are we willing to share in this program, there is a program in existence at present in which exactly this is provided for. Its name is the Canada assistance plan, for which the Minister of National Health and Welfare is responsible, and in this plan we are providing 50 per cent of all the costs of social assistance in this country for families in need. That has been provided by this government and this Parliament for many years and we are going to continue to support such programs to help families in need.

In addition, as I indicated, we took steps well before the budget was brought down to help senior citizens in need by adding \$35 a month to the incomes of all senior citizens who are benefiting from the guaranteed income supplement.

Mr. Crosbie: Madam Speaker, the minister's contempt for lower-income people in this country is stupendous. We are not just talking about people who are receiving assistance because they are on welfare. We are talking about lower-income people who make under \$20,000 a year and who are working, as well as those who are receiving assistance under the Canada assistance plan. Our question to the minister is very direct. Given the fact that heating fuel oil costs, as one example, which strike the poor and lower-income people more than any other aspect of energy costs, have already risen 24 per cent this year and it is forecast in the budget of the Minister of Finance that energy costs will go up 21.95 per cent next year, is the government going to introduce a program, energy tax credit, call it what you will, either in association with the provinces or not—and it should not be because this should be a federal government program to help lower—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Crosbie: You were the people who caused the situation.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I would ask the hon. member to formulate his question now.

Mr. Crosbie: Madam Speaker, the people to our left scuppered the lower-income people of this country. Will this government now give an affirmative answer to the province of

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Ontario and introduce relief from rising energy costs for people on fixed and low incomes? Never mind present programs; I am referring to a new program today.

Mr. Lalonde: Madam Speaker, I do not know where exactly the hon. member is getting his figures, but consumer price index figures for the month of October, 1980, indicate that the rise in energy costs in September was 6 per cent.

Mr. Crosbie: It was 9.2 per cent for fuel oil.

Mr. Lalonde: Since October, 1979, it has been 18.2 per cent. I am quoting Statistics Canada figures. I suggest the hon. member check his figures very carefully. Second, we have already indicated that for an average family the savings arising out of our budget as compared with the Conservative budget of last year amounted to as much as \$1,000 per family.

Mr. Crosbie: Who cares?

Mr. Lalonde: These have been measures which have been taken in the last budget to help Canadian families. That amount is substantially lower than any benefit that would have been provided by the Conservative government. We have acted to provide for decreases in the price of energy which are fair to the consumers of Canada and to the families of Canada.

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THE ECONOMY

CALL FOR TAX CREDIT TO OFFSET COST OF LIVING INCREASE

Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview-Greenwood): Madam Speaker—

An hon. Member: Now you will hear the truth!

Mr. Rae: —perhaps if the minister had a standard of comparison different from the last Conservative budget, he might find himself being a little less complacent about the finances of Canadians.

I should like to address a question to the Minister of State for Finance. The hard fact remains that with today's increase in the cost of living, which marks the third year in a row that there has been a real decline in the standard of living of the average Canadian, and with the statement in the budget by the Minister of Finance that Canadians will have to learn to accept the real income consequences of higher energy price increases, I should like to ask the minister—quite apart from comparing his budget to the budget which never happened—how he can justify over a three-year period, now a four-year period or indeed a five-year period, the lack of a cost of living tax credit for the average and lower-income Canadians in this country at a time when they see the cost of living going through the roof? How can he justify that in absolute terms, rather than in comparative terms with what may or may not have happened a year ago?