

Oral Questions

happy to hear from my hon. friend if he has any specific ideas that we can entertain without—

Mr. Speaker: We are going to have to move on.

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we have an idea. Call an election and we will fix it.

[*Translation*]

The Prime Minister rises in the House and refuses to propose any solutions. He has no solutions to offer at all.

Today there are 1.6 million unemployed in Canada, each costing this government \$14,000. We made some suggestions to the government in January, but the government refused to act on them.

Today there are rumours the government may embark on a joint program with the municipalities and the provincial governments. Why did the government not act in January, as we suggested? If it had, we would not have 1.6 million unemployed in Canada, each costing the Canadian Treasury \$14,000. We are in this mess because the government does not know what to do and refuses to do anything at all.

[*English*]

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, what the hon. Leader of the Opposition should recognize is that there are 12,240,000 Canadians who are working.

In 1984 there was something like 11 million Canadians working. Yes, indeed unemployment levels are too high, but yes, indeed we have had five consecutive quarters of growth. They are not robust, but they are certainly consistent with the growth in the global economy.

For those who suggest that we do not live in a globally interdependent economy, you better look again. The Canadian economy is weak in many respects because the global economy is weak. Notwithstanding that, we are making progress. We have made progress on inflation, we are making progress on unemployment, we are making progress on retail sales and our exports are achieving an all-time record.

Therefore, there is a turnaround. It is slow but sure. However we are making progress.

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, the words of the Minister of Finance will be cold comfort to

the 1.5 million Canadians who are out of work and to their families who he claims do not even exist.

Some hon. members: Shame.

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister.

In his recent press interview he in effect admitted that he had made mistakes in his government's economic policies and their timing. For the millions of Canadians damaged by these policies, those who are hit by the trade deal, hit by the GST, hit by higher taxes, hit by loss of jobs, this admission of guilt even as part of a plea for mercy simply is not good enough.

I ask the Prime Minister: Why will he not also move away from these policies he now admits are mistakes and bring in a new economic plan, a new budget, today to create more jobs and real growth right now? If not, what is the point of that admission of guilt?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I know it will probably offend a Liberal for a politician to admit that he is not always right, but from time to time that is the reality in Canada.

What I acknowledged readily in an interview with the Canadian Press was that I, along with all other leaders of the industrialized world, including all of the leading economists whose work we had the opportunity to examine, had not anticipated with as much accuracy as we would have liked the duration of the economic recession and/or economic downturn, depending on the country. I do not think there is anything wrong with that. No one, not even my hon. friend who offered to resign in 1980 if interest rates went up and they went up 17 points or thereabouts—

An hon. member: And he is still there.

Mr. Mulroney: He hung right in there for the government pension. It never crossed his mind to resign.

An hon. member: That's principle.

Mr. Mulroney: I would point out to the member a statement by the Leader of the Official Opposition who in 1978 when he was finance minister said—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Mulroney: They do not want to hear it, Mr. Speaker, and I can understand that.