

Oral Questions

shatters, will he at least make an economic statement to this House?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the unemployment figures released today were a disappointment, but they must be seen in perspective and we must not forget that in recent months, we have created a large number of jobs in Canada and also that, basically, Canada's economic growth is strong. The figures released for January, for instance, which are the latest figures, indicate a substantial growth rate for Canada. A growth rate of 1.3 per cent over a period of one month means one of the highest rates we have ever had.

I may remind him as well that, as far as comparison with the United States is concerned, Canada in recent months has experienced a higher growth in productivity per hour worked than the United States. However, this gain in productivity also means we were unable to increase the number of jobs created. As I said before, I hope that in addition to our increased productivity, we shall also see expanding employment and a reduction in unemployment over the next few months. There is reason to believe that this year, there will be a reduction in unemployment, not an increase.

[*English*]

UNEMPLOYMENT AFFECTING HEADS OF FAMILIES

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Finance. On two occasions recently I have raised the plight of unemployed heads of families with the Minister, and he has just shrugged off their difficulties. This morning we learn there are another 23,000 heads of families who are without work, bringing the total of unemployed heads of families to over half a million. When you take into consideration the number of dependants, the number of children in these families, that brings the total to over two million people who are living solely on unemployment insurance benefits or welfare.

In view of the significant increase this month in unemployment among heads of families, some 23,000 of them, is the Minister content once again to shrug off their concerns, knowing of course that he and his family will be well looked after if the Prime Minister can land him a job with the OECD?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member is making statements which the record will show are completely unfounded. This Government has indeed shown a great deal of concern toward those who faced with unemployment during recent years. This has been quite clearly stated in a number of statistics that have come out showing that this country, for instance, has maintained its social safety net much better than just about any other industrialized nation during the last recession and the last several years. For instance, while in the United States something like 35 per cent of the unemployed were covered by unemployment insurance

during the recent recession, we have something like 85 per cent of Canadians who were protected during that particular period. I could mention a number of other figures. The actual figures, for instance, are that during 1982 more than 80 per cent of the unemployed were covered by unemployment insurance benefits. As I said, in the United States the figure was 35 per cent.

● (1125)

We have shown our concern, and continue to show our concern for these people who are facing those difficulties. I must say that I do not think we have any lesson to take from the Tory Party in terms of compassion for those who are in difficulty. One only has to refer to the statements made by a number of them in the last several months to know where their heart is.

Miss MacDonald: If that is the concern and compassion which the Minister of Finance can show for those who are in real difficulty, and if that is his understanding of what it is all about, then sending him off to Paris is a small price to pay for what might come to help out these people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

PLIGHT OF UNEMPLOYED FEMALE HEADS OF FAMILIES

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Minister could come to grips with the issue more clearly if I focus it for him. I refer him to the fact that there are 100,000 women who are heads of single-parent families and are out of work today. That is the highest level ever in that category. I say to the Minister that a woman in a situation like that, with two children dependent upon her, probably has a total income of \$7,000 per year.

How can the Minister be satisfied, as he said over and over again, with the economic recovery when there are 100,000 women and their children living on that amount of salary, or that amount of income, which is so far below the poverty line?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, here again, I need only refer to certain statements, made by supporters of the Progressive Conservative Party regarding the attitude of that Party towards women, to conclude without hesitation that the Liberal Party and the Liberal Government do not have to be told by the Progressive Conservative Party how to protect women's rights in this country. The Hon. Member knows perfectly well that some very influential people within her Party have recognized this fact and admitted that the Progressive Conservative Party is lagging behind the other Parties in the House in this respect.

I may also remind the Hon. Member that regarding unemployment, and especially unemployment among women, the latest figures for last month show that compared to all other categories, women had experienced the highest growth in