

Oral Questions

stronger than our population would warrant. NAFTA will, of course, help to maintain our auto trade.

I am mentioning the auto trade first because the hon. member mentioned the St. Catharines closing. We have known about the St. Catharines closing. It was announced about three months ago so we have known about that. We are willing to help in any way we can together with the province. It should be pointed out that that is 800 jobs, but 21,000 jobs were announced to be gone in the automotive industry in the United States yesterday.

We are living through a downsizing throughout North America and we are more than holding our own.

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Madam Speaker, that is an awful answer. It certainly does not send any relief to the thousands of Canadians who this week have been told by the government that they are bums, and at the same time have been told by companies that they are no longer wanted.

I ask the Minister of Finance whether he agrees with his colleague, the minister of employment, who said yesterday that many of the employed wanted to collect unemployment insurance so they could spend their winters in Florida.

Does he agree with that patently absurd statement? Is that really why he has taken these punitive measures of taking \$2.4 billion directly from the hands of unemployed Canadians who are already begging for work from a government that seems to have no answers?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, much of the savings that will be realized in the actions that were taken will be reappropriated and reallocated toward more training and skills upgrading. Some \$3.8 billion will be spent on training and a new initiative will be undertaken with respect to the provision of co-ordinating the demands and the learning skills with the private sector so that there can be better synchronization of filling the job demands in the private sector.

What is being constituted here is a freeze of the average UI benefits. As I indicated in the House yesterday, this is not the first time it has happened. When the Leader of the Opposition was the finance minister, he cut the benefits from 66 and two-thirds to 60 per cent.

There was no grandfathering. Both existing and new claimants were covered. He cut a million Canadians. At that time inflation was running at 9 per cent. At that time, the whole unemployment insurance program amounted to \$4 billion. He took \$935 million out of the program and nobody squawked over there. It was not a tragedy then. It was far more severe, far more serious than it is today. Why the double standard?

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

I am sure if the former Minister of Finance, now the Leader of the Opposition, would repent, Canadians would be happy if the current Minister of Finance would repent too for his economic statement.

In the last 48 hours three major corporations have announced job cuts across the country totalling over 3,000 jobs. Today Statistics Canada reports that more than 80,000 people are unemployed than last month and that 60,000, three-quarters of them are women.

It is true that we have today the highest number of unemployed in the history of Canada. The measures announced by the minister this week will simply result in a net over-all job loss of 62,000 more jobs.

I want to say to the minister that it is clear that Canadians need to be getting back to work if we are to address the debt and if we are to address the pain across this country.

Will this minister withdraw his economic statement and bring in a policy that will bring hope to Canadians?

• (1130)

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): No, Madam Speaker, because it is an economic plan that is comprehensive, responsible, and deals with the situation as the country is today.

It provides for investment in people. It provides for investment in infrastructure. It provides ways and means to improve our trading performance. It provides for action to contain the deficit.

I believe most objective observers, in the circumstances that we find ourselves in, would find this a very credible plan. I ask the hon. leader of the New Democratic Party, rather than just picking on one or two items,