

Ontario and Quebec. The minister has talked about not believing the figures with respect to expected job loss. My question is: does he have an alternative figure with respect to expected job loss caused by this obvious reduction in drilling? Has the minister the courage to report those findings to the House of Commons today?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Madam Speaker, supposedly the hon. member is comparing the figures for last year and this. The hon. member knows that quite frequently in winter there are fewer drilling rigs operating than during the rest of the year.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Andre: It is the other way around. They drill in winter.

Mr. Lalonde: I wish to refer the hon. member to the figures which were published in *Oilweek* magazine. I suspect he will believe these figures a little more than some of the others he has been referring to. *Oilweek* says that the number of rigs drilling in Canada on January 6, 1981, was 442; on January 8, 1980, it was 442; on January 9, 1979, it was 398. These are figures from what I submit is a very reputable magazine.

Mr. Wilson: Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is for the same minister. Last year it was winter at the same time as it is winter this year. Those figures are the same year after year. If the minister would listen, the question I asked was in relation to the percentage of inactive drilling rigs. Last year it was 16 per cent and this year it is 38 per cent. That is a fact.

● (1430)

My supplementary question deals with the fact that energy development is largely within the control of the federal government. The government has been looking for all sorts of excuses on which to blame this reduction in drilling activity which is solely within its responsibility.

The incompetence of the minister and his officials in designing the program has been underlined day after day over the last few weeks by knowledgeable people in the industry. Nova, a very responsible Canadian company, has said that the National Energy Program will not sustain the business activity declared as its objective. Does the minister recognize the serious damage which delays in introducing changes to this disastrous program will create for projects which will provide jobs across the country—pipelines, petrochemical activity and heavy oil development? The delays are causing serious problems and we need action from the government.

Mr. Lalonde: I can see that the hon. member is pursuing the line taken by his party, that of being the lobby for the oil industry in this House. That party may pursue that line as long as it wishes, but I can tell the hon. member that as of January 6, 1981, there were exactly the same number of drills in operation as on January 8, 1980. There has been no decline in drilling activity in this country.

Mr. Clark: That is not true.

Oral Questions

THE ECONOMY

INQUIRY RESPECTING ACTION TO DEAL WITH ALLEGED CRISIS—SUGGESTED ESTABLISHMENT OF FAIR PRICES COMMISSION

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, I direct my question to the Minister of Finance. During the past three years price increases have outstripped wage and salary increases in excess of 3 per cent. What this meant in 1979 in human terms for the typical Canadian family is that they suffered a net loss in real income of some \$1,200. Over the Christmas period a number of economic agencies forecast that this terrible trend will worsen in 1981. Is the minister now prepared to recognize that we have an economic crisis in Canada, and what is the government prepared to do about it?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, the hon. member urged on December 18 that the House accept the notion that Canada is in the midst of an economic crisis. I understand that over the weekend he called for the declaration of a national economic emergency. As I stated in December, I do not believe that the condition in Canada justifies the description of "crisis".

Undoubtedly, a serious attitude must be taken to our economic problems. I laid out in the budget a framework of economic policy which, in my view, barring further shocks in the oil industry or similar unexpected events, will put the Canadian economy on a course of resumed growth. That is my opinion. I have listened carefully to the views of the hon. member and other hon. members and I will consider any alternatives that are presented, but up to the present time I have not found any proposal which has been made that would not be more harmful to the economy or that would have very much value. I gave this same opinion on December 18.

I would add that the situation, since that time at least, has improved modestly with respect to interest rates and with respect to the strength of the Canadian currency, which is a rather important factor in combating inflation in this country.

Mr. Broadbent: Madam Speaker, the minister may not think there is an economic crisis, but the Parliament of Canada and the ruling by Madam Speaker just before Christmas decided that there was such a crisis. Over the Christmas holidays the results of a poll conducted across the land indicated that six out of ten Canadians believe that we face an economic crisis in 1981. When will the minister catch up with the perceptions of the people of Canada on this matter?

Further, will he not accept the implicit suggestion of his own Prime Minister, who acknowledged before Christmas that the government has the authority to establish a fair prices commission, which could order rollbacks of all unfair price increases? That is a concrete suggestion which would cost the people of Canada no money and have an impact on inflation. Why does the government not bring in a fair prices commission?

Mr. MacEachen: Madam Speaker, the hon. member has been talking about the establishment of a fair prices commis-