

Oral Questions

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the first thing the hon. Leader of the NDP might do is appeal to her leader in Ontario to stop putting road-blocks in front of a recovery out of recession, as the president of the Ford Motor Company said the other day.

I recognize the difficulty and the hurt that is going out there, but I think it is important to maintain a balanced perspective. She talks about the free trade agreement and the GST, but I have to tell her that in the last year or so these are the firms that have closed their operations in the United States and have transferred their operations to Canada: Canadian Thermos Products, Scarborough, Ontario; Gandalf Technologies, Nepean, Ontario; Huron Cable, Waterloo, Ontario; Hughes Aircraft, Midland, Ontario; InterCity Products, Brantford, Ontario; Kodak Canada, Toronto, Ontario; Keeprite Incorporation, Brantford, Ontario.

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I would certainly congratulate the Minister of Finance on naming all those wonderful companies that are moving to Ontario, and we know why.

I would like to direct my supplementary question to the Prime Minister. Economists everywhere are questioning the economic policies of this government and are crying out for change. I want to say to the Prime Minister that the anger and fury we have seen across the country are very quickly turning to despair, fear and hopelessness.

In fact I can quote from letters that I receive every day. I received one just yesterday from a man who was laid off at his work. He states: "I have worked in the construction trade for 10 years. It is hopeless. I cannot get a job. I cannot hold my head up high".

I want to say to the Prime Minister: rather than simply talking about people who are whining, these people who are laid off are not whining. They are feeling a sense of hopelessness. I call on the Prime Minister himself. Will he call a first ministers' conference on the economy?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that we are going through some very difficult times, but I have not found any knowledgeable person who has suggested we should change course.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Mazankowski: Mr. Speaker, I do not think that even the treasurer of the province of Ontario would recommend such an alteration of course.

What is in fact occurring, and the OECD reported today, is that there is genuine sluggishness in the world economy. The OECD has reduced its growth projections by three-quarters of 1 per cent to an average growth rate in the industrialized world of some 2.2 per cent. They have adjusted the Japanese growth rate from 3.5 per cent to 2.5 per cent and the United States down to 2.2 per cent. Canada is part of the globalized economy. Canada is part of the global trading area and we cannot isolate ourselves. Therefore, we have put in place a program, a plan that will alleviate the inflationary pressures, that will keep interest rates down and that is the best approach to sustainable growth with price stability.

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): I wish to ask the Prime Minister a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. If the Prime Minister is unwilling or unable to bring the nations's first ministers together to discuss constructively a situation that is so tragic for so many families in Canada, he should seriously consider retiring. I would ask the Prime Minister to use the time he has left to show leadership and compassion and to call a first ministers' conference to implement policies that will give new hope to families across the country.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I have already said many times that I just completed a series of meetings with the premiers across the country.

The Minister of Finance will meet his finance colleagues for two days starting on the 12th of this month. After that, he will advise me on the usefulness of holding a first ministers' conference on the economy.

Several premiers have already said publicly that they would not want to attend such a meeting if the purpose was simply to blame Ottawa, because they approve of the Canadian government's over-all policies. But we will decide to hold such a meeting, and I will be pleased to call one, if we can have interesting ideas from the premiers. I will ask for specific ideas. To date, our policies have produced the lowest inflation rate in 20 years, the lowest interest rates in 18 years, and the highest growth rate in the industrialized world today. In a difficult environment, I think we must admit that is not so bad. Indeed it is very good for Canada.