

Oral Questions

INCREASE IN NUMBER OF LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Madam Speaker, we have 824,000 Canadians who are now classified as long-term unemployed. They have been unemployed for more than three months. That is 52 per cent of the total of those unemployed. I might add the percentage is 9 per cent higher than last year. Added to that, Madam Speaker, there will be another 600,000 students coming into the job market soon, looking for permanent jobs. Behind every one of these figures there is the potential for human tragedy. Can the Prime Minister not grasp the meaning of what it is to be unemployed, what it is to have your unemployment insurance benefits expire, and what it is to have to go on welfare? Surely we, as a compassionate society, owe something to these people, because we created this unemployment in the first instance?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I am not sure what the Hon. Member means when he says "we created this unemployment." If he figures he created it, I do not think we would want to admit that this Government created it. It is perhaps an admission the Hon. Member can take to his breast. But anyone who looks at the reality of the world crisis, with more than 30 million unemployed in the OECD countries alone, that person would realize it would be difficult to think that Canada is putting people out of jobs in the U.S., Britain, France and Germany and all those countries where there is very high unemployment.

It is a world crisis. In our country we are not trying to absolve ourselves from any responsibility to deal with it. Once again, I think it would be cruel to take the line proposed by the Hon. Member, which seems to presume that some quick fix would give jobs to all these people. If the Hon. Member knows this fix quick, I am surprised his Party did not promote it when it was in power and when its Minister of Finance was announcing unemployment of 10 per cent for several years ahead. If the Tories had a quick fix, why did they not use it? If they have one, why are not the various leadership candidates putting it forward now?

REQUEST FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF PARLIAMENTARY TASK FORCE

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Madam Speaker, surely the Prime Minister must realize and appreciate that we have today in this country a social crisis of unprecedented proportions. We have to address that crisis and I am not talking about any economic quick fix. I am talking about the social crisis facing the two million unemployed and their families, and the fact that 36 per cent of families are directly experiencing unemployment. Half of them expect to be directly affected by unemployment. This places a burden on the families, the municipalities, and the Provinces. Surely we have a responsibility to address that problem.

• (1420)

I make this appeal to the Prime Minister who, I believe, to be a compassionate man. Will he at least agree to form a

parliamentary task force so that we can get out of this ivory tower which we are in, and see for ourselves just exactly what we are doing to the unemployed of this country who are left out there by the Minister of Finance, without hope?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I want to return the compliment to the Hon. Member. I believe he is also compassionate. I am surprised that he feels the need for a parliamentary task force to express that compassion.

The problem is, what do we do with this very severe social and economic problem? For the past two years this Government has been saying that in order to regain our markets, create jobs in Canada, and make investment attractive to those who have savings, we must bring down inflation. When inflation has been lowered, investment will then become more attractive and we will then be more competitive in the world markets. We will be able to sell more in Canada and abroad.

Following the budget of the present Secretary of State for External Affairs last June, we have succeeded in getting the Canadian people, the Provinces, the municipalities, and the federal Government to pull together to bring down inflation to its goal of 6 per cent. That is why we are beginning to see the signs of revival. Just this morning we heard that we have the first surplus in ten years in our automobile trade with the United States.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: That is because demand is picking up in the United States since Canadians are becoming competitive.

We have brought inflation down. Our interest rates have come down with it. That is our approach. It is perhaps less verbally compassionate than that of the Hon. Member, but at least it has tackled the problem and brought a solution to it. I have not heard anything close to that from the Hon. Member or his Party.

REQUEST FOR INTRODUCTION OF SHORT-TERM JOB CREATION MEASURES

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance who will know that, unfortunately and tragically, unemployment in the last number of months has risen to the point where we face almost two million unemployed. One of the impacts of this recession is that thousands of people, particularly young people, have had to apply for welfare. For instance, in Metro Toronto alone, one-fifth of the total welfare case load concerns young people under the age of 25 years who have to get by on less than \$300 a month. They are losing hope.

Yesterday, the Minister indicated that in his budget proposals there could be measures to deal with immediate job creation in the short term. Will the Minister please bring those measures forward immediately, rather than forcing these people who might be affected by the programs to wait another