

Oral Questions

Mr. Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend speaks of jobs that are lost. In a dynamic economy such as ours, there is an enormous turnover in any given year in terms of plants closing and plants opening. That is the way it is in an internationally competitive world.

My friend says that the Minister of Finance finally admitted that the economy was slowing down. The Minister of Finance predicted that the economy would slow down when he brought in his budget. Part of the plan was to drive the inflation out of our system. We are trying to create a climate of non-inflationary economic growth. My friend asks how it can be done. A principal way that it can be done is to keep program and other government spending under reasonable control.

In the decade that preceded the swearing in of this government, program spending increased by some 12.0 per cent a year. Since this government has been in office it has been held to 3.5 per cent a year on average.

My hon. friend might give some advice to the Premier of Ontario whose spending has been rising at 10 per cent a year. That is not good for Ontario and it is not good for Canada.

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[Translation]

TREASURY BOARD

Mrs. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the President of the Treasury Board. The Minister would have us believe that this bill, which would force ships' crews and hospital services employees back to work, is necessary to protect the public. However, the Minister and the Minister of Transport have admitted that the shipping dispute does not affect public safety. Will the Minister acknowledge that the problem is not caused by the fact that these employees are on strike but by the government's failure to designate these employees as essential and thus get results in these negotiations? What explanation does he have for this kind of incompetence?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I want the Hon. Member for Ottawa West to listen carefully to what I have to say. Mr. Speaker, at this very moment, operations on the river are perfectly safe, but we do have 126 ships operating on the river and in

the Seaway, and no one has any control over the weather or over ice conditions on the river.

Mr. Speaker, we have three weeks left before the St. Lawrence Seaway is closed. Millions of tons of Western wheat are now on the river and in the Seaway, and there is a risk that this wheat will be stuck on the river for the duration. If the hon. member doesn't agree we may have an emergency on our hands, Mr. Speaker, I think that is totally irresponsible.

[English]

Mrs. Catterall: Mr. Speaker, winter and freeze-up come every year. The minister's officials knew last year that they should have been declaring these workers essential.

The minister knows now that all it would take to settle this issue is a decent fair wage offer that would cost far less than the strike is costing every day.

Will the minister admit that his back-to-work legislation is just a sham to cover up the government's abysmal failure to respect the collective bargaining process and to reach a just and fair settlement which could be reached in hours?

Mr. Bouchard (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, once again I call upon my colleague to understand that the St. Lawrence River and the St. Lawrence Seaway today face a safe circulation of ships on the Seaway. The hon. member states that one year ago we should have done something. I am asking members to do something today: support the legislation which is here.

Thousands of Canadian jobs depend upon the traffic of the St. Lawrence Seaway. I ask the Liberal and NDP Parties to be serious and to keep those jobs for Canadians.

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I have a very serious question for the Minister of Labour. Could the Minister of Labour tell this House how he could possibly justify bringing back-to-work legislation against the ships crews and the hospital services workers of the federal Public Service when both of the groups are more than willing to continue negotiation?

• (1440)

Both of the groups are more than willing to provide emergency service.