

Oral Questions

I will communicate in writing with the occupants of the homes he has described. Over the last 12 months I have written to approximately 15,000 Canadians and I will certainly continue that practice.

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● (1440)

THE ECONOMY**INCREASE IN UNEMPLOYMENT**

Mr. G. M. Gurbin (Bruce-Grey): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance. In February, 1980, when the present government and the present Minister of Finance took office, the unemployment level in Canada was 949,000. Today it is 1,250,000. That is 300,000 extra workers, with families to support, who are out of work. Will the Minister of Finance, with his policy, accept responsibility for the additional 300,000 Canadians out of work today as compared with the time when he took office?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): No, Madam Speaker, because the hon. member has referred back to 1980. From that date, unemployment in Canada gradually decreased until a year ago. Until last August unemployment in this country was at the lowest level it had been at in five years. When we had that very strong performance of the economy, I did not hear the hon. member paying us any compliments for that strong performance. The fact of the matter is that, in common with other countries, we have slipped into a recession, and that is the cause of the problems at the present time. It is not the policies of the Government of Canada. The policies of the Government of Canada are directed with the thought in mind of reducing unemployment as much as possible.

STANDARD OF LIVING

Mr. G. M. Gurbin (Bruce-Grey): My supplementary, Madam Speaker, is also to the Minister of Finance. If the Minister of Finance would check the record, he would know that on many occasions he has taken the credit for reductions in unemployment through his economic programs. He now fails to take the responsibility for the increase in unemployment with the same programs.

Madam Speaker, high interest rates are the most significant factor facing business, agriculture, and prospective home owners in Canada. If there are not major economic changes, the crisis we are facing will turn into a panic. The minister repeatedly tells us that he is the victim of international circumstances. I would like to ask the Minister of Finance, if that is the case, why since 1968, when Canadians enjoyed the third highest standard of living in the world, we have now slipped to thirteenth under his programs?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, it is not necessary to

answer that question because the allegation in the question is unfounded and untrue.

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AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY**CANADIAN CONTENT IN IMPORTED VEHICLES**

Mr. Joe Reid (St. Catharines): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. In a speech prepared for him and delivered in Toronto on his behalf before the auto parts manufacturers, it was stated that the Volkswagen agreement, with respect to Canadian content added, was the harbinger of things to come in the automobile industry. In the light of present circumstances, and in the light of the comments made by the Prime Minister of Japan, has the minister backed off from that position, or does he still take the Canadian content added as a thing to come?

Hon. Herb Gray (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce and Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Madam Speaker, we still look to increase Canadian content in imported cars sold in this country, and that is a very important objective. I repeat, as I said in my speech to the auto parts manufacturers, which was given on my behalf by my parliamentary secretary, that the agreement with Volkswagen is a very good model for Canadians, and for countries wishing to sell cars into our market.

CONSEQUENCES OF GOVERNMENT POLICY

Mr. Joe Reid (St. Catharines): Madam Speaker, the minister has pointed out that he still looks to and accepts this as the model. In the light of the comments made by other representatives in his cabinet in this House, when does he expect to have some fruit fall from that production and that position being taken by the minister himself?

Hon. Herb Gray (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce and Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Madam Speaker, we are working actively on a number of possibilities. I look forward to progress and hope to have announcements in the coming months. It will be a lot easier to ensure that progress, if the questions and comments by all my hon. friends' colleagues on that side of the House would not give aid and comfort to those who do not want us to achieve these objectives.

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[Translation]

SMALL BUSINESS**INQUIRY RESPECTING PARTICIPATION BY QUEBEC IN FEDERAL PROGRAMS TO ASSIST EXPORTS**

Mr. Pierre Gimaïel (Lac-Saint-Jean): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of State for Small Busi-