

Oral Questions

is prepared to come to work in Ottawa and give his department the priority attention it and the unemployed in Canada require, so that we can have a budget brought in before the end of February.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I was in Ottawa on Monday. I left at eleven o'clock and returned at three o'clock. I worked in my department all day outside of that time. I do not have to be given any lessons by the Leader of the Opposition as to how to work for my country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Chrétien: Within a month after we returned in the fall, I had an economic statement and I changed the economic policies of the government somewhat. When I feel we need another budget, I will propose one. At this time, I think the best thing to do is to try to pass the legislation we have before the House. Of course, there is no miracle solution to this problem of the growth in unemployment. We are extremely preoccupied with it. Tomorrow I will meet with the ministers of finance. Next month the Prime Minister and the premiers of the provinces, with the ministers of finance, will have a meeting on all these matters. I am devoting all my time to that. However, I am not neglecting the other problems in Quebec. I believe I have to remain in Canada and fight for it. I will not make any cosy deal with Lévesque.

● (1422)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, will this part-time minister—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: —give us a commitment to bring in a budget before the end of February? Will he tell the House of Commons, now, whether he and his government have rejected completely the idea of accepting the advice of the OECD and most other economists to add more stimulus to the Canadian economy through tax cuts or some other means, so that we will not have even more Canadians out of work as a result of the policies of this government to date?

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, last week we had a meeting with the business people of this country, who stated that the economic policy of the government is the right one. The Conference Board said the same thing. Some people who are not known to be our friends, such as the president of the Royal Bank and the president of the Toronto Bank, agree with our policy. The only banker who does not agree with our economic policy is the former president of the Western Bank.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Clark.]

REQUEST FOR REASSESSMENT OF GOVERNMENT'S EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Following the release by Statistics Canada earlier this month of the unemployment figure, showing 8.5 per cent—an all-time high rate of unemployment for the country—the minister is reported as having said, and I quote, “the system is probably working as well as it can, given the plight of the western world economy”. While he was saying that, the OECD were issuing a report saying that Canada had the worst record of unemployment of any industrialized country in the western world.

I ask the minister, who I suspect is a little shaken up, having to bear this terrible burden of unemployment under this government, on behalf of the one million unemployed Canadians in this country, many of whom are facing hardship, whether he is prepared to reassess the government's employment programs in light of the failure of these programs to have any significant impact upon the terrible unemployment situation in the country.

Hon. Bud Cullen (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I will try to be precise. I suggest to the hon. member that he read more carefully the OECD report, which indicated that Canada ranked number three among the countries that faced better prospects for recovery. We were after Japan and the United States as the third country that would, in fact, recover. I have indicated to ministers at provincial conferences that I am quite prepared to look at the Canada Works program to see if we can build in the economic growth component and work toward a more permanent type of job creation. We have had a twelvefold expansion in our job experience training program. That has been successful. The work sharing program now comprises some 12 different projects, where people are working who would not be working if we had listened to the opposition parties and had taken it out of the recent legislation. Therefore, we are doing our bit.

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FINANCE

REQUEST FOR FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL DISCUSSIONS ON INCREASED COST OF WELFARE BENEFITS

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I will direct my final supplementary to the Minister of Finance. The one million Canadians who are unemployed will draw little consolation from what we have just heard, given the fact that Italy's record is better than ours on this question. On the basis of information from the Unemployment Insurance Commission, during the month of December over 2,000 people per working day were coming off unemployment insurance and having to go through the humiliation of applying for welfare, thereby placing a terrible burden on the provinces as well as on the people concerned. Is the minister prepared to enter into discussions with the provinces to measure the additional eco-