

Oral Questions

Mr. Lalonde: Already I hear the Leader of the NDP jumping. I might remind him that the same situation is occurring with his socialist friends in France. As a good member of the Socialists International, he should realize the problem is worldwide at the present time, and is not only a Canadian and American problem.

To come back to the serious question raised by the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands, as the Minister of Employment and Immigration just stated, we are doing everything to speed up the implementation of the expenditures that we have announced in order to help the situation. I have indicated that I will have a budget early in the new year, but I do not want to leave any impression that that budget is going to be able to resolve the unemployment problem and the very serious situation that we are facing in Canada, as well as in all industrialized countries, at the present time. What is important is that we address the problem seriously, responsibly and consistently, and that is what we are trying to do.

● (1125)

DURATION OF INDIVIDUAL UNEMPLOYMENT

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, the unemployment rate in the United States is 10.8 per cent, and that is serious, but in Canada it is 12.7 per cent. That is the difference.

My supplementary question is directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. One year ago people who were without work for 14 weeks, or longer, numbered some 270,000 people. Today 605,000 Canadians have been without work for 14 weeks or longer. That is over a 100 per cent increase. These are the people who will shortly be running out of unemployment insurance benefits. The program which the Minister announced will deal with 10 per cent of that number. What is going to happen to the other 90 per cent who have families to care for, homes to maintain, financial contributions to make? What is going to happen to them? They, too, are looking for an answer.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, we have dealt with that particular question in this House several times. What we have pointed out, both in a study which was published by our Department, and in answer to many questions, is that a substantial percentage of those who exhaust their benefits find alternative employment within a matter of seven to 12 weeks. In fact up to 35 per cent or 40 per cent do find a job within that period of time. To use the figures which the Hon. Member suggests, simply is not accurate. The fact is that people do find employment.

What we have determined from our studies of the labour market is that it is a very active, dynamic labour market. There are something like 250,000 people per month who are presently unemployed who do find new jobs. So there is a very active labour force both going into and out of the market at

the same time. That is why I think it is very important that the Hon. Member try to be more accurate in her analysis, rather than simply using those gross exaggerations.

EXTENT OF UNEMPLOYMENT—MINISTER'S POSITION

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Finance. The unemployment situation, which seemingly everyone in the country but the Cabinet recognizes, has reached an alarming state. We now have lost more than 100,000 jobs in lay-offs in the last two months alone. This is since the time the Minister made an optimistic forecast about the last quarter. We now have numerically a level of unemployment in Canada that is equivalent to the total labour force of half of our Provinces.

I would like to ask the Minister of Finance if he does not agree that the situation now is alarmingly different from what he forecast when he made his October speech? And if he thinks it is alarming, why does he not bring in something now which will give Canadians some hope?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Leader of the New Democratic Party seems to have discovered today the serious unemployment situation in this country.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lalonde: We have had a serious unemployment problem in this country for many months.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lalonde: I am glad that the Hon. Leader of the New Democratic Party recognizes this fact and admits it, but I refer him to my statement of October 27 when I said in that statement that we had a very serious unemployment problem which was at that time roughly at the same level as it is now, 12.7 per cent. I indicated that the unemployment level would decline only gradually in this country, but we were addressing it seriously and we were taking steps to try to cope with the people most affected, those who saw their unemployment benefits ending.

● (1130)

We allocated \$1.1 billion six weeks ago to help ease the unemployment situation. The Minister of Employment and Immigration indicated that we would be able to start spending that money before Christmas in order to help the people of this country who are suffering from unemployment. These are actual steps which have been taken, and we are going to do everything we can to continue helping those people.

REQUEST THAT GOVERNMENT INTRODUCE NEW PROGRAM

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, the Minister has just referred to his October 27 statement. Will the Minister have the honesty to admit to the House that in that statement he said that there would be an improvement in