

Inquiries of the Ministry

● (2:30 p.m.)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**THE CANADIAN ECONOMY****FIRST QUARTER GNP GROWTH—MEASURES TO STIMULATE ECONOMY**

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the Minister of Finance who has just entered the House. He will have to be on the job more if he is going to get the gross national product moving forward satisfactorily. In view of the report by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics that the gross national product grew at a disappointing rate during the first three months of this year, substantially below the rate of increase during the final quarter of 1970, is it still the minister's position and that of the government that the economy is moving forward satisfactorily and that unemployment will fall by a satisfactory rate or is the minister now prepared to take measures to stimulate the economy and get it moving forward at a satisfactory rate?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. It seems to me that the whole question asked by the Leader of the Opposition is in the form of a proposition to the House or an argument, and I wonder whether the question in those terms is acceptable. Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition might like to rephrase the question.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, my question is whether, in view of the report of the Dominion Bureau of Statistics regarding the GNP figures for the first quarter of this year, the Minister of Finance is now prepared to take measures to stimulate the economy of the country?

Hon. E. J. Benson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, starting a year ago we have taken measures to stimulate the economy in Canada. Whether it requires further stimulation is a matter which the government will have to decide, and I shall be bringing forward a budget in the near future.

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WELFARE**MEASURES TO AVOID REDUCTION IN PAYMENTS—SUGGESTED MEETING WITH PROVINCES AND CITIES**

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): I have a supplementary question for the Minister of National Health and Welfare, Mr. Speaker. In view of the report that the city of Halifax is finding it necessary to reduce welfare payments, an indication of what is taking place in many cities across this country, is the minister prepared to meet with the provinces and cities with a view to adopting measures to ensure that deserving Canadians do not go hungry as a result of the municipalities having to cut down on welfare because of additional unemployment?

[Mr. Coates.]

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated before in the House, the provisions of the Canada Assistance Plan amply reveal the willingness of the federal government to share in these costs. On the question of getting together with the provinces to discuss this matter or other questions of this kind, may I say that I am meeting with the provincial ministers next week.

Mr. Stanfield: I have a supplementary question for the Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker. Will the government increase its effort to fight these evils to at least half the effort it is making to try to win the constituency of Central Nova?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

HALIFAX—REPORTED REQUIREMENT THAT APPLICANTS OBTAIN EMPLOYERS' SIGNATURES BEFORE ASSISTANCE GRANTED

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, may I direct a supplementary question to the Minister of National Health and Welfare which is related to part of the questioning by the Leader of the Opposition. In view of reports from Halifax that welfare officers are requiring certain welfare applicants to get the signatures of 20 or 30 employers before they can be granted welfare, will the minister have an investigation made into this practice to determine whether it violates the provisions of the Canada Assistance Plan?

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, we will be meeting with the provincial welfare ministers at the beginning of next week. Undoubtedly such situations, and others to which hon. members referred last week, will be discussed by the welfare ministers at that time.

Mr. Forrestall: Will you raise it?

SUGGESTED INCREASE IN FEDERAL PAYMENTS UNDER CANADA ASSISTANCE PLAN

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): May I ask a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact that the problem does not concern the 50 per cent share of welfare costs which the federal government pays, will the government consider picking up a portion of the additional cost that the provinces and municipalities have to pay? Will the federal government increase its contribution beyond 50 per cent?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, at this point I cannot add anything to what the Minister of National Health and Welfare has just said, that he is meeting with the welfare ministers of all the provinces next week and they are going to discuss various questions, including the Canada Assistance Plan. There is nothing that can be announced to the House at this point.