

Income Tax

the western world. In stating that, I am also asserting that it is extremely serious—

● (1550)

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Madam Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. There may have been occasion during the full hour of the question period when, because of other subjects that came up, I was smiling. I was not smiling because of the plight of the unemployed. I say to the hon. member he has no monopoly on concern for people who work in this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: If I in any way left the impression that we have a monopoly on concern for the issue, I apologize. However, I do not withdraw the comment I made earlier that throughout a good part of the question period the Minister of Finance was smiling, and the Conservative party wasted, in my judgment, a good part of the time of this House dealing with military bands. That is a question of judgment, and I do not retract one bit from that.

To complete the reference to the government, this country is self sufficient in mineral resources, petroleum in particular, as are few other countries in the world. If we had half the competence in managing our economy which West Germany has, we would be going somewhere. West Germany imports virtually all its petroleum, has the lowest rate of inflation in the world and the fullest employment. However, this government with all our resources manages to maximize the worst of both evils. We have high inflation and virtually full unemployment.

What do the ministers who have official responsibility say? The Minister of Finance—and he can again correct me if he thinks I am incorrect—says in effect that the Canadian economy really cannot do much in the way of improvement until the American economy improves. I think that is a reasonable summary of his defensive reaction in the House this afternoon. I see he is rising to his feet again.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. If the hon. member wishes to assume my acquiescence in everything he says is agreement, he does not have that assumption. That is not what I said. That is not the way I put it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: That is precisely the conclusion I drew from the minister's answers this afternoon. It is the same conclusion I drew from the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Gillespie) when he was asked about the 100,000 increase in unemployment in the province of Ontario. He clearly said with regard to the automotive industry in this country, which is in a depression and not a recession, that nothing could be done by the government until the situation in the United States improved. Surely that is a perfect example of the bankruptcy of years of government by the Liberal party. The Minister of Finance says he cannot do anything about the general economy until the American economy in general improves. The Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce says he cannot

[Mr. Broadbent.]

do anything about the automotive industry until the American automotive climate improves.

With today's unemployment statistics the Minister of Finance has reached the culminating point in the series of ad hoc approaches and speeches he has made, the tentative gestures he has made since the throne speech of last fall. In both the throne speech and the budget which followed it, the Minister of Finance and the government tried to play it safe. They did not reach the conclusion that the real problem in the economy would be a recession. Nor did they say the real problem would be inflation. They recognized there were both aspects. They were right in that. However, instead of coming forward with a program intended to deal with either in a significant way, or hopefully both in a major way, they opted out completely from dealing with either situation. They tried to play it safe. As a result we have had both escalating inflation and escalating unemployment.

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) was correct when he stated that all the Minister of Finance has done in the past few months is go around the country and talk about building some kind of consensus instead of giving us definitive programs, whether in the business, labour, agricultural or fishing sectors. Instead of making specific proposals, the Minister of Finance has simply been listening. That is really an excuse for no action at all.

Instead of showing leadership with regard to the problems of the Canadian economy, the Liberal party holds seminars. We are right back to the days of the 1968-72 government when the Liberals sat out and indeed exacerbated an economic crisis situation, hoping that it would go away.

On behalf of my party I wish to make four concrete proposals that even this government would not foul up if it considered implementing them. Before doing that, however, I want to put something on record about the unemployment situation. There are 817,000 unemployed Canadians, the highest number since the depression. A few years ago in this House we talked about 3 per cent unemployment being the crisis point beyond which we should not permit our economy to go. We have not had 3 per cent unemployment for years.

We now have a real rate of unemployment, that is the unadjusted rate, of over 8 per cent. Where is the expression of concern for those 817,000 Canadians? In this House it is virtually non-existent. In terms of those figures there is an increase in unemployment in nine of our ten provinces. This is not simply a regional consideration.

One of the most decisive and negative indicators about where our economy is going is the province of Ontario. We ought to note that with great seriousness. When there is an increase in unemployment in Ontario of 100,000 in one month, the whole country had better take note. In terms of our productive capacity of goods and services, as well as in terms of consumption of goods and services produced in other provinces, this is extremely important. This is possibly the most alarming statistic that has come out in terms of unemployment figures in the past dozen years.

An acquiescent Minister of Finance who can accept that statistic complacently is a disgrace to this parliament. That is certainly the attitude we got this afternoon.