

Oral Questions

situation in Canada, he called it "a normal winter month". Is the minister aware that in December of this year, compared to December of last year, there were 9,000 fewer people working in manufacturing, 33,000 fewer working in the construction industry of Canada, and 16,000 fewer working in the transportation industry?

• (1420)

If he is aware of that, would he indicate if he is content to see that type of fall in employment. If not, what can he specifically tell us today about what the government plans to do about it?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, obviously there are changes in the over-all composition of the work force in Canada from time to time, depending upon changes in the over-all economy. I acknowledge that fact. I presume the hon. member would agree that there is bound to be change of that kind and that it is healthy in a growing economy. What the hon. member ought to focus on is that despite the difficulties we are facing, not only in Canada but throughout the world, we have at the present time the highest proportion of the Canadian adult labour force working in the country. That is the overall test of employment strength in Canada.

Mr. Stevens: Madam Spaker, stripped of its gibberish what the Minister of Finance is indicating is that the shift in the work force in Canada is away from the producing sector to the government sector; that is where his employment is taking place.

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AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY**STATUS OF FINANCING AGREEMENT WITH CHRYSLER CANADA**

Hon. Sinclair Stevens (York-Peel): I would like to ask the minister more specifically concerning the present status of the Chrysler arrangements. Seven months ago today the government entered into an agreement with Chrysler Canada and the Chrysler Corporation which anticipated that a billion dollars would be invested in the Canadian company to try to keep the company alive, and presumably keep a work force numbering directly and indirectly some 35,000 employed in Canada. Would the minister indicate whether there has been any change in that plan and, if so, what will the government do to relieve whatever the coming situation may develop into?

[Translation]

Hon. Charles Lapointe (Minister of State, Small Businesses): Madam Speaker, there has been no change in the Canadian proposal for refinancing the Chrysler Corporation. The Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce is monitoring the situation on a daily basis together with his American counterparts, but for the time being, no change in the original plan is being considered.

[English]

LABOUR CONDITIONS**SUGGESTED CONFERENCE OF LABOUR LEADERS**

Hon. Sinclair Stevens (York-Peel): Madam Speaker, since we have what I regard as unsatisfactory answers concerning the government's position on the unemployment situation in Canada, would the Minister of Finance, as the Deputy Prime Minister, indicate whether any thought has been given to the holding of a conference to involve labour leaders, small business leaders, industrialists, the government and provincial authorities to see if some solutions can be found for the economic plight this country is drifting into, or are we to see in the coming months total inaction on the part of the government?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I again wish to draw to the attention of the hon. member that even though the employment rate we have is serious, the average unemployment rate for 1980 is precisely the average rate that Canada experienced in 1979.

Mr. Stevens: Which was bad.

Mr. MacEachen: It is a full percentage point below what the figure was in the middle of the preceding year. I draw to the hon. member's attention that, despite the fact that the world and Canada has been going through a very soft period, the economy has performed reasonably well in the creation of jobs. Just before the Christmas break I had a meeting with the provincial finance ministers in which the state of the economy was discussed. I have an open mind with respect to the desirability of holding further consultations with respect to the future of the Canadian economy. I will give consideration to the representations made by the hon. member.

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INDUSTRY**ALLEGED SHELIVING OF DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview-Greenwood): Madam Speaker, my question is also addressed to the Minister of Finance. The figures announced today show that there are really 1.4 million people who are unemployed, if you include those who have been laid off and who have lost their jobs. This means that there is a misery rate, which combines the rate of real unemployment, plus inflation, plus interest rates, of 39 per cent, which is the highest ever in Canadian history. I would like to ask the Minister of Finance just how bad must matters become before the government recognizes that we are in an economic crisis and that it is time for it to change course?

• (1425)

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I am relying upon the statistics issued today by Statistics Canada which show an