

Brunswick and we had a very interesting conversation. Some alternatives were suggested to us, and considered, as well as our alternatives suggested to us by our own department and also by the interdepartmental committee. The reason we formed a new committee, as the hon. member has mentioned, is that before consideration of all these alternatives that were suggested to us we do want some of our senior people to look particularly at this Miramichi area so that we can find solutions which will give the people of the Miramichi the alternative whereby they can keep the employment and the economic activity that they already have.

ASSURANCE SOUGHT ON FUTURE OF BASE

Mr. Maurice A. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): Madam Speaker, my supplementary obviously is to the Minister of National Defence. I wonder if the minister would make clear to the House that he has not announced that the base in Chatham will close, and that he has said that in fact the economic benefit and the level of employment will be retained, so that the hon. member for Fundy-Royal will stop spreading that falsehood.

Hon. J. Gilles Lamontagne (Minister of National Defence): Madam Speaker, the hon. member from Miramichi is absolutely right. The commitments are there, so the base will not be closed as an economic activity. We are finding some alternatives to make sure that all the area will benefit from the government's decision.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

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FINANCE

REQUEST FOR INCREASED TAX REBATE ON FARM FUEL

Mr. Charles Mayer (Portage-Marquette): Madam Speaker, I would like to put a question to the Minister of Finance. The minister will know that farm fuel costs are a major expense to farmers. He will also know that presently we are experiencing higher costs for farm fuel in Canada than are the Americans. We are in the process of having a further increase this year. At the same time the federal government is taking between 40 and 60 cents a gallon on that same fuel. I asked the minister back in January whether he would consider increasing the rebate. I would ask him again if he would consider it, and I do not mean a long time away but that he would give serious consideration immediately to increasing the rebate so that we can pay lower prices for farm fuel. That would do two things. It would help farmers and give them some hope to stay in business. That would help the job situation. It would also hold out some hope for lower food prices to help the consumer fight inflation.

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I understand the interest of the hon. member. However, every step, every

proposal he has made, will cost the treasury more and will add to the deficit. In those circumstances I do not know how hon. members can ask me to take an anti-inflationary position and at the same time ask me to add more and more to my expenditures or to the revenue losses.

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LABOUR CONDITIONS

UNEMPLOYMENT IN CAPE BRETON, N.S.

Mr. Cyril Keeper (Winnipeg-St. James): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance. While unemployment has reached record heights right across the country, people in hard-hit regions in Quebec and the Maritimes are in truly desperate straits. In the minister's own riding in Cape Breton, if we count those receiving unemployment payments as the measure of the level of unemployment, rather than the Statistics Canada figures, the unemployment rate jumps to 30 per cent. As the representative of Cape Breton Highlands-Canso, at what level of unemployment will the minister recognize the need to change his economic policy and stimulate the economy to create jobs for all?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I will submit my performance as a member of that constituency to my electors.

Mr. Keeper: And that submission will not be unopposed, Madam Speaker.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

UNEMPLOYMENT IN QUEBEC

Mr. Cyril Keeper (Winnipeg-St. James): Madam Speaker, my supplementary to the Minister of Finance is this. Quebec unemployment has jumped to 14 per cent this month, up from 12 per cent last month and 11 per cent last year. Even this province-wide figure is unheard of. Yet in hard hit regions of Quebec it is even worse. For example, in the St. Laurent-Gaspé region—

Madam Speaker: Order. Order. Today's questions are really inordinately long. The hon. member does not seem to be making any exception to that. I would urge hon. members, if they all want to get into question period, to be shorter.

Mr. Keeper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Unemployment in the St. Lawrence-Gaspé region has reached 25 per cent. Just how high will unemployment have to reach in these hard-hit regions before the minister recognizes that people are hurting and that they need economic policies that will create employment?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I just want to say that I regard that really as a rhetorical question. The hon. member knows perfectly well that there is no one in this House who is