

Oral Questions

We have been pressing this government and the Liberals before it to give VIA the resources it needs to get genuine, modern equipment for the next decade and beyond, but our calls have fallen on deaf ears.

And yet perhaps this is not too surprising. From a government that has dumped on passenger rail, this is entirely consistent.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Mr. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Jonquière): Mr. Speaker, nearly two months before the implementation of the GST, Canadian businesses and customers still do not know what is happening with the goods and services tax.

The liberal Senate and Jean Chrétien continue holding the government hostage and ridiculing democracy, with the consequence that our business people and the public in general are thrown into insecurity. Seven million Canadians are waiting for a cheque before Christmas to compensate some effects of the GST. Unfortunately, we still do not know if these 600 millions dollars or so will be paid in time for Christmas.

Mr. Speaker, in view of such abuse of power, let us wish at least that the people of Beauséjour realize the rotten deal Jean Chrétien has in store for them if he gets to represent them here in Ottawa.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[*English*]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister. This fall, with the Canadian economy in recession, with thousands of workers losing their jobs in the plant closings announced almost weekly, in fact with thousands of Canadians suffering because of the government's high interest rate and high dollar policies, the Prime Minister has said he will not convene a meeting of First Ministers on the economy.

I ask the Deputy Prime Minister: Will the government show leadership on this matter for a change? Will the government announce an immediate First Ministers'

conference on the economy? Or, is it unwilling to do so because it is afraid to face the music? Is it afraid to face up to the reality of its own mismanagement of the Canadian economy?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, at this very moment, is out in western Canada speaking to people, talking about policies and issues and defending the government's record. He certainly is not acting like a person that is afraid of facing the very hard issues.

I can tell the hon. member, as he is well aware, that under the provisions of the Meech Lake Accord there would have been a process set up on a permanent basis where such meetings would have taken place. Unfortunately, with the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, that has not been implemented.

I can advise my hon. friend that there is a very thorough consultative process that is taking place under the auspices of the Minister of Finance. He is in the course of meeting with finance ministers of the provinces, as he will be meeting with labour and other important representatives of the Canadian economy as he prepares and lays the ground work for a new budget. It would certainly be premature now, having regard for the fact that that process is in fact in place at the present time.

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, when the country needs leadership, the Deputy Prime Minister is confirming that once again the Prime Minister has decided to abdicate his responsibility.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister knows full well that conferences of this kind were convened very often in the past and that the Meech Lake Accord was not the only justification for them. Again I ask the Deputy Prime Minister why, in these recessionary times, is the government not prepared right now to call an economic conference of provincial premiers and the Prime Minister of Canada? We do need such a conference.

[*English*]

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I think it is fair to say that we have