

Oral Questions

Of course, increasingly we will be able to deal with the problem of job creation, which will improve the problem of poverty among Canadians. He also knows very well that it is not the only reason why we face the problem. I just gave him the example that three years ago in Toronto the unemployment rate was about 3.5 per cent, which is basically no unemployment because it is negligible. We have, however, in Toronto a lot of people who face the problem. In other words, we have to cope with the question of poverty from different angles, what we are trying to do and what we will do.

I want to say to the member that it is not just a question of job creation, it is a global problem to which we have to find a global answer.

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THE ECONOMY

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, as it is the last day of the session I, too, would like to offer season's greetings to yourself and to all members of this House on behalf of myself and my party, and to wish everyone a good family occasion and a very happy and healthy holiday season.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, there are still a million and a half Canadians who are not going to have a very happy holiday season, namely those who are out of work, and the almost two million men, women and children who are also on welfare. Just this week we heard that 3,000 jobs in Oshawa are at risk, another 3,000 in rail in Montreal and in Winnipeg, and as a result of today's softwood lumber decision, we heard that more jobs could be at risk in that particular industry.

There is a way to turn this around. I want to say to the Prime Minister that I know that the budget consultations are going on, and I want to ask him if indeed we can see a new direction in economic policies in the next budget.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I would join my friend, the Leader of the NDP, and the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition in wishing you, Sir, and members of your staff and the pages and all members of the House of Commons a very happy holiday season.

In regard to the question about a new economic direction, I suppose that will have to wait for the budget pursuant to consultations that are ongoing with the Ministers of Finance.

The reason for my delay today was that I had a communication from the Minister of Finance, who is presently meeting with his colleagues in Ottawa for the first of a two-day series of meetings. He called to advise that over lunch earlier today, they had discussed with one another the feasibility and the advisability of convening a first ministers' meeting to discuss the economy.

I am advised that the consensus is that it might indeed be a good idea to meet. Some of the finance ministers had some ideas in regard to conditions, the agenda, the clear objectives, the absence of any finger-pointing exercises and so on.

I would hope, given what the Minister of Finance conveyed to me earlier today, that after Question Period we will be able to communicate with the first ministers about their availability and the possibility of holding this kind of a meeting, perhaps before Christmas if we can, if their schedules allow, failing which we will do it at the earliest possible moment. After that kind of meeting, I might be able to give my hon. friend more guidance with respect to any change of direction that may or may not occur.

[Translation]

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is for the Prime Minister. I am pleased to hear that there will be a meeting of first ministers and my question deals with that issue.

Is the Prime Minister open to a new direction for economic policies? Is he open to new suggestion on the economy, because unemployment is too high and this is tragic for many families, for the poor, for the less fortunate and for children?

I would also like to ask the Prime Minister whether he is open to new suggestions for the economy and whether he is willing to change the government's course if there is a consensus at the first minister's meeting.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my New Democratic friend asks me if I am open to new suggestions for improving the economy. Of course I am. Which ones?