

Oral Questions

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, that answer makes even less sense than the ones we usually get from the Minister of Finance. Let me ask the Minister of Finance whether Canadian workers, in terms of productivity gains, are restricted to the 2 per cent ceiling, unlike management which has no restriction, or are they not?

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, since I was the one who made the point perhaps I would be permitted to answer the hon. member. I will get the precise wording of the regulation for him. If we find there are savings as a result of the unions or the employers doing away with or negotiating away restrictive working practices which result in significant productivity gains, then the workers can share, in those exceptional circumstances, with the employers in those savings, and those savings are not then brought within the guidelines. Also in respect of a piece-work basis, if this results in increased productivity the same would apply under an incentives scheme. I would be pleased to get the precise wording for the hon. member.

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the Minister of Labour or the Minister of Finance, if either can give us a single example of the workers being given the advantage of this regulation in the five months the program has been in existence? Secondly, given the government's reiterated commitment to the poorly paid workers in Canada, I should like to ask why the government does not immediately increase the minimum wage in Canada to at least \$3.50 an hour?

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): To answer the latter part of the hon. member's question first, he may be aware that it was just a short time ago that we raised the minimum wage from \$2.65 to \$2.90, to be effective April 1. This was a significant percentage increase and only 10 cents an hour lower than the latest position taken by the CLC, being \$3. I think the hon. member should be aware of that.

As to whether the Anti-Inflation Board has permitted the exceptional circumstances, in which there might be that type of high productivity as a result of technological change, or the circumstances I have identified, in which workers might share in the savings, I am not aware but I can check.

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[Translation]

THE CANADIAN ECONOMY

POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAM TO ALLEVIATE UNEMPLOYMENT IN QUEBEC

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I want to put a question to the right hon. Prime Minister.

Since the unemployment situation is getting worse, particularly in eastern Quebec, and given the announcement last week that some 400 small slaughterhouses will be closed in Quebec, which will cause further unemployment, could the Prime Minister tell the House whether he will recommend that his government increase the budget of the Department of Public Works, so that funds be allocated especially to the eastern Quebec region, in cooperation with the province and the municipalities?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that the President of the Treasury Board announced two or three months ago that the federal government would seriously try to cut its expenditures, and so we have reduced the rate of growth of the Department of Public Works and of several other departments. We have also put an end to some voluntary assistance programs, like LIP. We have reduced expenditures. However, I take note of the hon. member's words and I will see if, within authorized expenses, there is a way to help the region he refers to.

● (1420)

UNEMPLOYMENT—EFFECT OF COMBINE IN SASH AND WINDOW MANUFACTURING IN EASTERN QUEBEC

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, on a supplementary.

In view of the comforting reply of the Prime Minister, I should like to draw his attention to the fact that currently, in the same area I have just spoken about, steps are also being taken to centralize the manufacture of windows and doors, and a very specialized organization is buying up all the small businesses that are now offering considerable employment in eastern Quebec. Would the Prime Minister also be willing to take that situation into consideration and see to it that we are able to offer the largest possible number of jobs to our local manpower?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I shall gladly point out the problem to the ministers concerned. In addition to the Minister of Public Works, there is also the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion who will certainly make it his duty to look into those problems. I cannot help but remind the Social Credit Party of Canada that it was very severe in condemning the government claiming that it was spending too much. Had they been more understanding in this regard, I might be less astonished to hear them now encourage us to spend more.

Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I should like to put one last supplementary.

I do not recall having chided the government for spending logically, for the good of the whole population. In any event, I would like to ask the Prime Minister whether he would be willing to make reforms in the financing of the public sector of the federal administration, enabling the government to accept the performance of public works without affecting the budget further.

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I am willing to look into all reforms, specially those that would allow us to spend more without increasing our budgets. If the hon. member has the key to that one, I would be very eager to hear about it.