

year was 7.5 per cent compared with 6.5 per cent in September 1976.

● (1552)

Statistics Canada estimates for the week ending on October 15, 1977, indicate an unadjusted level of employment of 9,844,000, for an increase of 19,000 over September. The increase was 24,000 for men 25 years of age and over, but there was a 5,000 drop for those between fifteen and twenty-four. It remains practically unchanged for women in these two age groups.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you once more for your attention, and I hope that the representations that have been or will be made from this side of the House will be welcomed by members on the government side who have a majority, and that action will be taken.

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a few minutes to give an official answer to the opposition motion by the hon. member for Rimouski (Mr. Allard) who has delivered a long speech about the Canadian economic situation and the solutions that his party has been proposing for a long time to solve the economic problems that all modern economies are facing.

Obviously, it is very useful to have such debates. We had a very long one, which lasted eight consecutive days, in October when the House resumed its proceedings and, as we know, Mr. Chairman, all that debate turned around purely economic matters. I, as Minister of Finance, being the main spokesman for the Canadian government on economic matters, insisted on speaking early in the fall on the economic situation and giving my own assessment as new Minister of Finance of the state of the Canadian economy in my budget speech, with due consideration for the new circumstances now prevailing, as the economy was not performing according to the predictions of my predecessor, the hon. member for Rosedale (Mr. Macdonald). Obviously, we have problems of long standing and an unemployment rate which is unfortunately too high. We also have an inflation rate which is disappointingly high but can be accounted for. At the time when I spoke on the budget, on October 21st of this year, we were in a very difficult situation. The second quarter of the year, as far as economic growth is concerned, had been negative. And that is why at that time, Mr. Speaker, I presented that budget.

Economic problems are complex. When the hon. member for Rosedale presented his budget early this year, he predicted some decrease in the unemployment rate as, in his view, 250,000 new jobs should have put a curb on the unemployment rate. Now, looking over the present situation, we find that the Canadian economy for the year 1977, according to the latest figures, has generated not 250,000 new jobs, but 292,000 which is a tremendous performance, some 20 per cent over what the hon. member for Rosedale had predicted.

Although the Canadian economy has created more than 292,000 new jobs since the beginning of this year the unemployment rate is a little higher than we expected. This is due to a situation which is not within our control. In fact it is quite normal in a modern society, that the participation of Canadians in the labour force should increase at a much faster rate.

Canadian Economy

Nowadays it is common occurrence in our Canadian economy that two or even three salaries accrue to the same family, while generally speaking women traditionally used to stay home. Now, as soon as the children go off to school, most of them try to join the labour force.

This is why we are finding ourselves in this situation of having created 292,000 new jobs since the beginning of the year, and still having a higher rate of unemployment.

What is interesting for example in the October statistics in comparison with those of September is the fact that although the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 8.3 per cent, for the heads of family's category, that is the breadwinners, the unemployment rate went down from 5.1 to 4.8, a significant drop which changes the general notion we have about the unemployed being the man in the family. For this specific category of unemployed there is a slight decrease. Of course 4.8 per cent is already too much, but this means that 4.8 per cent of heads of families are jobless. While the usual interpretation generally given to the unemployed refers to that section of the unemployed labour force, very often today the unemployed is the second or third person in a family to earn a salary. We must admit that, with the provisions which have been adopted in the last ten years, the economic impact of unemployment in Canadian families has been somewhat reduced by a raise in unemployment insurance benefits for example and other social benefits which have been sometimes highly criticized by certain sectors of the economy on the basis that it is too expensive for the country. But on the other hand this insures a certain level of income in families, even if one of its members has unemployment problems.

Obviously, in the province of Quebec, which is represented by the hon. member for Rimouski (Mr. Allard) and myself, the situation gives us serious concern. Last October there was a substantial drop in the unemployment level in Ontario and while traditionally the gap between the two provinces has always remained fairly stable, last October, it widened in an alarming way, a fact which is not altogether foreign to the unstable political situation which prevails in Quebec at this time. I would like to say again to the House that in such circumstances, we had better hold a referendum as early as possible in the province of Quebec so that in any case this matter is settled in the near future.

The thing which surprised me greatly and I would like to mention it, Mr. Speaker, is that when CBC reported on the first anniversary of the P.Q. election they produced all sorts of statistics. But in that same poll, the people of Quebec had the question put to them—unfortunately CBC did not see it fit to mention it in its broadcast. It seems that they have made that information public but not in that program. Quebecers were asked the following question: would you like the referendum to be held within six months, a year, two years or later? 67 per cent of respondents would rather have it within six months or before the end of this year. I think that survey was taken in October this year. This proves that if we really wanted to carry out the wishes of the Quebec people who were told during the election campaign a year ago that there would be a referen-