

THE ECONOMY

PLIGHT OF THE UNEMPLOYED

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, I also have a question for the Minister of Finance. Since Parliament last sat to do its job, we have learned that the economy of this country is in its deepest decline since the 1930s. Just last week we learned that the largest number of unemployed ever recorded by Statistics Canada exists. We learned that the economy is operating at only 75 per cent capacity.

I would like to ask the minister, during the more than two weeks of absence of Parliament, how many unemployed workers did he talk to? How many people with mortgages up for renewal did he speak with?

Miss MacDonald: In his penthouse!

Mr. Broadbent: How many small businessmen who have gone bankrupt did he talk to? Is the Government of Canada now prepared to take some action to protect these Canadians?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss MacDonald: He just laughs!

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, the hon. member asks me how many unemployed workers I have spoken to since the House was last in session on March 2. I want to tell the hon. member that I have spoken to a good number of unemployed workers because I have been in my own constituency where there is a very high level of unemployment, and where I have discussed the policies which are currently being followed by the government in order to bring the economy out of a recession and in order to create the basis for sustained growth in the future.

Mr. Huntington: Come on out to mine and tell them.

Mr. MacEachen: No one knows better than I do the impact of unemployment because I have talked to those workers. However, I think it would be a mistake for me to go to my own constituents, some of whom are unemployed, to tell them that there are magic solutions, because they do not believe that. They are not taken in by the soothsaying of the leader of the New Democratic Party. I want to tell him that.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

GOVERNMENT ACTION

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, I want to say to the minister that the unemployed workers in his riding understand the impact of unemployment a little better than he does, contrary to what he would like to suggest.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Broadbent: However, we also learned during the past week that, for the first time since the Government of Canada has been making figures available, we have had a net decline in the number of jobs available, year over year, specifically in

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February when 162,000 fewer jobs were available to Canadians. Considering the fact that the minister, both in this House and in his speech in New York, made it very clear that the Government of Canada was exclusively relying on an upturn in the American economy before he anticipated positive effects here, and since only a week ago the Reagan administration itself acknowledged an upturn will not come in the U.S. economy until the end of 1982, how long must the people of Canada wait for the Government of Canada, their government, to take independent action?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, it would be a mistake for the Leader of the New Democratic Party to believe that in New York I had stated that our economic problems were exclusively dependent on solutions in the United States. The fact is that we are running very high levels of inflation. Our prices are very high. Our costs are increasing. If we intend to be competitive, if we intend to create conditions in our own country for recovery, and if we intend to participate in the international recovery, then we have to do certain things at home. Those things which are necessary at home have been laid out in the budget. The hon. member knows that unless we can create the conditions for growth in Canada, we will not get anywhere, and we will not get conditions of growth while we have these high prices and high costs.

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FINANCE

SOLICITOR GENERAL'S DESCRIPTION OF BUDGET

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): My final question, Madam Speaker, is directed to the Solicitor General. Since the Solicitor General has publicly stated that the fine work of the Minister of Finance, that is to say, the budget, is a political disaster, and also since the Prime Minister stated only a few weeks ago that no one in the cabinet was to make further criticism of the budget unless such criticism was accompanied by a letter of resignation, I would like to ask the Solicitor General if he has had the integrity to follow up his honest criticism of the budget with a letter submitting his resignation?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Bob Kaplan (Solicitor General): Madam Speaker, I would like to invite the hon. members opposite to read the letter, or even to read the report of it which is contained in the newspapers. I think that if they do, behind the colourful expressions which have been the subject of—

Mr. Broadbent: Colourful?

Mr. Kaplan:—their questions today, they will find that I supported the budget, that I support the need for restraint at this time, and that I am behind the Minister of Finance.