

### THE CANADIAN ECONOMY

#### POSITION OF WORKERS' AVERAGE WEEKLY EARNINGS IN RELATION TO CONSUMER PRICE INDEX—GOVERNMENT ACTION

**Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister based on the latest figures released by Statistics Canada which indicate that Canadian workers are encountering a progressively deteriorating situation. In light of his speech yesterday, I would ask the Prime Minister whether he is aware that average weekly earnings in December, 1973, were down by approximately \$5 compared with November earnings and were only 5.9 per cent higher than those of December, 1972, while the consumer price index moved up over the same period by 9.1 per cent thus eroding any gains made by Canadian workers? If the Prime Minister is aware of this situation, is the government prepared to introduce specific measures which will offset inflation to a level at which a worker can regain the purchasing power of his dollar?

**Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member will stay around for the rest of the session he will see what action the government is taking to deal with this situation.

**Mr. Alexander:** Since the Prime Minister does not wish to answer the question and since this is a responsibility of the Minister of Finance, can the minister advise us whether the budget will contain any new measures to ensure that any increases in wages will not be eroded by a high rate of inflation? Can the Minister of Finance give us that assurance?

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** He can't.

**An hon. Member:** No arithmetic needed.

**Hon. John N. Turner (Minister of Finance):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's seatmate says no arithmetic is needed and I can understand why he would want to say that. I think the House is entitled to look at the figures not only of the average wage as against the cost of living, where there has been a slight falling behind—

**Some hon. Members:** Slight?

**Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton):** —but to take into account also the figure of real disposable income, that is to say, the income of the average Canadian after discounting inflation, discounting taxes, adding transfer payments such as family allowances and taking into account the reduction of taxes in my budget of last February. Thus, for 1973 compared with 1972 the average Canadian, in terms of real disposable income, was 6.8 per cent better off.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. It seems to me this is debate between the hon. member and the minister rather than questions and answers and perhaps anticipates the debate to take place following the question period. However, the hon. member will be recognized for a supplementary.

### Oral Questions

**Mr. Alexander:** I appreciate the lecture the minister gave. I posed my question to him on the basis of information disclosed by Statistics Canada which shows that the purchasing power of the Canadian worker has been eroded by high inflation. Does the minister propose to bring in by way of a budget measures which will protect the Canadian worker in the event of higher wages being received? That is all I am asking.

**Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton):** Mr. Speaker, I was doing my best to reply to the hon. member's question in the same terms as those in which he put it to me. I got my figures from Statistics Canada, too.

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### TRANSPORT

#### RAILWAY FREIGHT RATES—PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO WESTERN PREMIERS

**Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North):** Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the Prime Minister. In view of the fact the Canadian Transport Commission has not yet turned over to the western premiers the information concerning freight rates promised to them by the Prime Minister some seven months ago, may I ask whether the right hon. gentleman can tell the House why this has not been done and when the western premiers are likely to get the information that was promised them?

**Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport, who unfortunately is ill, did report to me that he had met with the western ministers responsible for transport and that they had discussed this very matter about a month ago, I believe, and had reached a satisfactory conclusion as to the way in which to proceed.

**Mr. Orlikow:** Since the western premiers indicated yesterday that they are not getting the information, which can only be supplied voluntarily by the railway companies and they are not co-operating, is the government considering bringing in the necessary amendments to present legislation to require information on freight rate costs to be made available regularly as requested by the western premiers?

**Mr. Trudeau:** The hon. member has pointed out the nature of the difficulty. The commitment we made at the Western Economic Opportunities Conference was based on the assumption that there would be co-operation from the railway companies in this matter. There is some difficulty in getting these figures under the law as they interpret it, but we are still attempting to ensure that we will get their voluntary co-operation and that we will not be obliged to bring legislation into the House. However, if the government does feel it has to obtain legislative authority from the House I hope we will receive quick and spontaneous co-operation from all sides.