

Oral Questions

● (1440)

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister of Transport very carefully avoided going into detail about the nature of the plans and for the rather good reason that while negotiations and discussions are going on it is inadvisable to examine in the House the alternatives based on a number of hypotheses. Naturally, at the same time we examined what can be done in different circumstances and when the time is right we will make the plans known.

GRAIN INSPECTORS STRIKE—PROTECTION OF CONSUMER AGAINST PRICE INCREASES FOLLOWING SETTLEMENT

Mr. Bill Jarvis (Perth-Wilmot): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is also directed to the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board. In view of the fact that a continuation of the grain inspectors' strike until the closure of the St. Lawrence Seaway will create a supply situation which will promote inevitably an increase in the price of domestic milling grain in eastern Canada, will the minister inform the House of the contingency plans he has created to ensure that consumers in this part of the country will not bear the burden of unnecessary price increases in essential consumer items, caused in part at least by government inaction in formulating an acceptable settlement of this strike?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Justice): Well, Mr. Speaker, not only is the conclusion a simple barb not designed to get at any part of the whole question, it is clearly in those terms hypothetical. We are hopeful that a great volume of grain will still move down the seaway.

* * *

INDUSTRY

AUTOMOBILES—GOVERNMENT ACTION TO DEAL WITH FURTHER LAY-OFFS

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. In view of the fact that General Motors Corporation of Canada announced there would be 2,095 employees laid off by that company in the coming weeks, bringing the total number of lay-offs in the automotive industry somewhere in excess of 9,000, I should like to ask the minister if he has been in touch recently with the corporations in Canada to find out what their plans are for the coming weeks and whether he would tell us what plans his government has to deal with the anticipated increase in lay-offs.

Hon. Alastair Gillespie (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, yes I have. The position I announced in the House the other day described the condition as then existing as cautiously optimistic, and this has been confirmed by the heads of the major automobile manufacturers in Canada. I have been advised also in respect of the General Motors lay-off to which the hon. member referred that even after it is completed there will be 30,850 employees whereas in January this year employ-

[Mr. Jarvis.]

ment was at a level of 31,500 reflecting on a year over year basis only a very modest change in that corporation.

AUTOMOBILES—DIFFERENTIAL BETWEEN PRICES IN CANADA AND UNITED STATES

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): There is a marvellous optimism which prevails, Mr. Speaker. I have a second supplementary. Since the price of automobiles is obviously related to the number of cars sold, and since the minister has frequently told the House that the difference between the Canadian and United States price is in the neighbourhood of 7 per cent, could he inform the House if that 7 per cent figure pertains to 1975 models?

Hon. Alastair Gillespie (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, I believe that figure is within the ballpark. The reason I have a slight reservation is that there is a different percentage for each of the three major companies. If we take the three major companies I think that would be of the right order. The point I have made in the past is that there has been a diminishing percentage over the last few years.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby on a final supplementary.

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, my final supplementary is directed to the Prime Minister. In view of the fact that a random check of the three major motor companies in Canada, Chrysler, Ford and General Motors, recently taken in respect of the prices at which they were selling cars in Canada compared to the United States indicated that the price difference today for a medium-sized car is in the neighbourhood of 17 per cent and the price differential for a small sized car in respect of all three companies, which I think is rather curious, is in the neighbourhood of 11 per cent, would the Prime Minister take steps to have either the minister's staff changed or the minister himself so that we can get some accurate information.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, it would seem to me that the difference comes from the fact that the hon. member is using retail figures, as I understand it, whereas the figures on which we rely are wholesale figures. Perhaps the hon. member, if he does not change his staff, will send me figures.

* * *

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

ELIGIBILITY OF LAID-OFF AUTO WORKERS FOR BENEFITS

Mr. Allan Lawrence (Northumberland-Durham): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is directed to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration. Of these 9,875 Canadian workers who are facing various periods of unemployment in respect of General Motors, Ford and Chrysler Canada, 2,965 or almost 3,000 have been informed that their termination of employment is for an indefinite period. As there seems to be some question of interpretation by the Unemployment Insurance Commission officials concerning whether indefinite termination actually qualifies these people for unemployment insurance, I wonder if the min-