

Oral Question

we reached complete agreement with all provinces concerning an extremely important aspect in the review of social security, and more specifically social services. This represents a major step forward in the social security review.

[English]

Mr. Alexander: It is certainly amazing that after two years work the minister has not been able to arrive at an agreement with his colleagues with respect to the matters to which I have just referred. Is the minister now telling us that after 600 studies—and if he believes it or not, these are the figures I throw out—and after spending \$2 million, the orange paper is a bust and that the situation now requires an outside consultant to come and advise the minister what to do?

[Translation]

Mr. Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, the answer is negative, as negative as can be. Furthermore, I shall send to the hon. member a copy of the communiqué of our conference which will prove, once again, to what extent the hon. member is ill-informed.

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[English]

THE CANADIAN ECONOMY

INFLATION—POSSIBLE INDICATION OF GOVERNMENT'S INTENTION TO REDUCE UNEMPLOYMENT BY FIXED AMOUNT IN ATTEMPT TO REACH CONSENSUS ON RESTRAINT

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Acting Prime Minister. Since Mr. André Raynauld, the Chairman of the Economic Council of Canada, yesterday forecast, before Senate Committee increasing levels of unemployment during the coming year, I should like to ask the Acting Prime Minister whether in the government's consensus-building discussions with business, labour and other groups he and his colleagues have indicated any intention to reduce levels of unemployment by certain fixed percentage points, say by 2 per cent per year for the next two years, in the same way as they have proposed specific targets for the reduction of levels of inflation?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): One of the main purposes of the exercise which is now proceeding to obtain a consensus is so to create stability in the Canadian economy that levels of unemployment are reduced.

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Acting Prime Minister. Since the government has, I understand, set not general targets but specific targets for the reduction in the level of inflation, would the minister explain to the House why, in light of the Minister of Finance's claims recently that we are experiencing inflation because of increasing labour costs—that is a view I do not share, but that is his assessment—the government does not think it appropriate to indicate specific targets for a reduction in the level of unemployment?

[Mr. Lalonde.]

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, I must repeat what I said before. It is the view of the government, and particularly of the Minister of Finance, that a continuation of the recent rate of inflation would jeopardize employment opportunities in this country. I do hope we have his support for that point of view.

INFLATION—POSSIBLE STUDY OF EFFECT OF INCREASE IN PRICE OF NATURAL GAS ON EMPLOYMENT AND EXPORTS

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): A final supplementary question for the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. Since the recent decision of the Alberta arbitration board on gas pricing will lead to a doubling of the field price of natural gas and will have a major effect nationally, and particularly in Ontario both on consumers and industry, increasing the cost, for example, over-all of the product by some \$920 million, has the minister's department, concerned as it is directly with employment and exports, made an assessment of the impact of this kind of increase in the price of gas upon the industrial community of Canada, particularly in terms of its effect on employment?

Hon. Alastair Gillespie (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, we have not completed an assessment of that impact and I can assure the hon. member that it is the kind of thing we are looking at very closely. We are concerned about its impact on particular parts of the country, on particular industries and on the potential for particular industries.

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[Translation]

PUBLIC WORKS

DATE OF ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW POLICY FOR CONSTRUCTION OF RETAINING WALLS ALONG ST. LAWRENCE

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, I should like to put a question to the Minister of Public Works.

The minister will doubtless remember that some two months ago he told the House that his department was looking into the possibility of changing the regulations with a view to erecting retaining walls along the St. Lawrence river to protect its banks from the effect of navigation and erosion. Having made this commitment, is he now in a position to announce a new policy on the building of those retaining walls which protect riverside properties?

Hon. C. M. Drury (Minister of Public Works): No, Mr. Speaker, I am not in a position to make any statements, at this time, on retaining walls.

Mr. Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question.

Can the minister advise the House whether he will make public a new policy, since riparian owners are seriously threatened in early spring; even landslides are occurring in Deschaillons, Napierville, Lotbinière and St. Antoine de Tilly. The department is always late sending