

Oral Questions

Minister. It deals with the attitude of the Minister and, in particular, his officials, toward the public. The Minister will know that three weeks ago he received a letter from the Kitchener Chamber of Commerce which warned him that the "Big Brother" attitude adopted by his officials would be heavily resisted by taxpayers, forcing many of them to go underground. Has the Minister responded to the serious concerns outlined to him by the Kitchener Chamber of Commerce in its letter of January 6?

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Bussières (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I believe that we have responded in a very positive way to the concerns expressed in the letter from the Chamber of Commerce, for instance by asking Mr. Farlinger to examine our departmental practices with respect to serving the public, our top management performance in the Department, our district office administration, as well as our ways of dealing with the public. I believe that is one way to meet the concerns expressed by the Chamber of Commerce.

[English]

RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY KITCHENER CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE

Mr. Walter McLean (Waterloo): Mr. Speaker, the Minister will know that Hon. Members of Parliament on both sides of the House are hearing from increasing numbers of their constituents that the bullying tactics of his officials are not only creating financial traumas, which have been outlined, but are also contributing directly to individual health problems and family crises.

The Kitchener Chamber of Commerce in its letter to the Minister recommended practical ideas for improving the working relationship between Revenue Canada and the communities which it serves. A good Minister will act upon simple, straightforward recommendations. How many of these practical recommendations has the Minister acted upon?

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Bussières (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out to the Hon. Member that it may have escaped his notice that the preamble to his question unfortunately smacks of the worst kind of demagogy.

Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member should keep in mind that whenever taxes are being collected, it is because they were assessed as being moneys owed to all Canadian taxpayers, that is the millions of taxpayers who pay their taxes regularly, every week, or every month.

In cases where taxpayers are in especially difficult financial situation, we meet with them and try to make arrangements acceptable to both parties.

As far as the specific recommendations mentioned by the Hon. Member are concerned, I am considering them within the context of the study being carried out by Mr. Farlinger.

[English]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

PAYMENTS IN 1982 AND 1984

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, my question is a follow up to the question I posed yesterday to the Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance acknowledged yesterday that the possibility of the country, the Government and the private sector, being able to create an additional 1.5 million jobs in the next 12 months was not there. It was virtually impossible for that to happen. Recognizing, then, what necessarily flows from that, that there will be large numbers of Canadians who will not be able to find work during this calendar year, and recognizing that the Minister has frequently claimed that the economic recovery which is taking place will continue to grow and that there will be opportunities sometime down the road, why is it that the economy in 1982 was able to sustain unemployment insurance payments to 95 per cent of all of those who were unemployed, yet in 1984 the economy is only able to sustain unemployment insurance payments to 75 per cent of those who are currently unemployed?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member knows very well that the Unemployment Insurance Program is an insurance program. Under the law passed by this Parliament, payments under the program carry on for so many weeks according to the number of weeks in which one has contributed to the insurance program. Once people are off the Unemployment Insurance Program, there are other programs in our society to take care of people who are in real need, for instance, the Canada Assistance Plan.

The explanation I have to give to the Hon. Member is that the program is the one which has been passed by Parliament. Unemployment insurance claims are paid under that law for the number of weeks to which people are entitled, and it will continue to be so.

Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, the Minister, unfortunately, did not really answer my question. I was not asking how the program is structured. I know that.

REQUEST FOR EXTENSION OF UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE PROGRAM

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): I asked the Minister how it could be that, in the depth of the recession we have just come through, we were capable of paying unemployment insurance benefits to 95 per cent of those who were unemployed, while now, with the improvement in the economy which the Minister has indicated is there, we are only able to pay unemployment insurance benefits to 75 per cent of those who are unemployed.

Let me focus in on it a little bit. I have in my constituency a gentleman who has been unemployed for, I believe, one full year. His unemployment insurance benefits ran out two months ago. He reported to me as late as today that, because