

committee has said that it is going to be meeting shortly to discuss that very question. So I am not going to foreclose on options which might come forward from that meeting. I can say, however, in the most non-partisan way—because there are Hon. Members from all political Parties represented on that advisory committee—that it worked very effectively and provided the backdrop for what I thought was a very good conference. So I do not want to foreclose on any of the suggestions with which they might come forward.

Let me just comment briefly in response to the Hon. Member's question. In his preamble to the question he said that there was no strategy put forward in the Economic Conference. I will just repeat in one sentence what I said to the Hon. Member for Laval-des-Rapides. There was a very specific strategy in a number of areas set out in the economic statement of November 8 which provided the framework for discussion in those particular topic areas. That has been followed up by discussion papers on a number of those areas which have been released by individual Ministers.

The Hon. Member has said that consensus is difficult in deficit and trade. We recognize that fact but we did not shy away from putting those topics on the agenda. We knew we were not going to get consensus, but what we were trying to achieve was a better understanding of both sides of those very difficult questions among the proponents of the particular topic areas. That was an important achievement. I spoke to people on both sides of those issues after the conference who said: "I understand better what X said and what X meant". That, I believe, is a very important achievement.

Going back to what Mr. Hawke said, understanding is a very important step to co-operation and better economic development as we work together in facing the problems.

Let me say that I share the view suggested by the Hon. Member in his preamble that there probably could have been a greater degree of dialogue instead of the presentation of prepared positions. I feel that the workshops themselves, the concurrent sessions on Friday night and Saturday morning, achieved that dialogue to a better extent than was the case in the plenary sessions. Perhaps there should be more of a bias towards the workshop sessions as opposed to the plenary sessions, in order to draw people out in a more informal atmosphere rather than in front of the TV cameras in the plenary sessions.

I prefer not to say more at this point without having the views of the private sector advisory committee which represents quite a broad spectrum of Canadian thinking on this.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate.

● (1250)

Miss Aideen Nicholson (Trinity): Mr. Speaker, over seven months ago, on September 4, the Canadian people gave to this Government one of the largest majorities in Canadian history. That majority was based on an understanding that the Conservative Government would create employment. To use the words of the present Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) in his

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election campaign, "tens of thousands of jobs" would be created as soon as the Conservative Government took office.

Canada had emerged from a severe world recession with an economy that was showing some signs of strength in that inflation and interest rates were down and jobs were being created, although not at a level fast enough to accommodate our very rapidly growing labour force. Canada's record of job creation has been unusually good for many years but we have also had a faster growing labour force than most OECD countries. By the beginning of 1984 some three million more people were employed than had been employed in 1968, but we still had Canadians who wanted work and could not get it. Even the Department of Finance paper which was made available at the weekend conference says that the severe recession in 1981 to 1982 led to a sharp decline in employment, but by the end of 1984 "the level of employment had rebounded above its pre-recession peak. The resulting decline in the unemployment rate was relatively moderate, however, due to large gains in the labour force".

Nevertheless, the Conservative Government came in with assurances that it had the answers to deal with this situation. Here we are, seven and a half months later, with very little new legislation, no Budget, and we now learn there will be no Budget until the end of May. But at least as distressing as the absence of a Budget is the absence of any thoughtful discussion on the state of our economy. There is room for serious discussion. There is room for honest differences of opinion on the best way to proceed at this time in order to ensure that the recovery is durable and that government policies facilitate economic growth and a return to prosperity with full employment.

It is regrettable that the Government has not been willing to have a very full debate on economic policies in the House so that ideas could be examined carefully and thoughtfully. We had an economic statement in the middle of the Throne Speech debate which certainly put severe limits on the possibilities for discussion, and increasingly questions asked in the House on economic matters are being turned back with partisan shots or are the subject of jokes and one-liners. The Government has made no attempt to take Parliament into its confidence, to explain, persuade, advance and develop argument in favour of whatever plans it has for the future. After seven months we are left to guess and draw conclusions from ministerial statements and positions which are often contradictory.

The economic statement on November 8 cut many Government programs, including the National Research Council. Yet the Government is talking about wanting to encourage research and development and innovation. The economic statement emphasized restraint, yet when the Government's Estimates were introduced for the year 1985-86, they were the highest in History and included large additions to the Prime Minister's personal staff and the personal staff of Ministers. The Government talks about creating confidence. Surely a necessary condition for confidence is order and predictability. Yet decisions are made very rapidly or are not made at all. For