

Oral Questions

Miss MacDonald: What has this couple ever done, except to work hard all their lives, that they should be the target of the Prime Minister's threat to scare the hell out of people?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, again, the Prime Minister is not doing anything that is not done in most developed countries of the world. I spent the weekend looking at statistics on this subject. A few months ago, for example, the Leader of the New Democratic Party was telling us the wonderful things which the socialist government was doing in France. I read on the weekend of the latest developments in France. They are certainly not of the nature which the leader of the NDP had in mind. Mr. Mitterrand has done a 180 degree turn, reducing social security and increasing the contributions of employers and employees to unemployment insurance and so on. I am just trying to say that the situation which exists in Canada is one which exists in all countries or in most countries of the western world at this time. The measures which are taken in other countries of the world, of course, will not be so dissimilar from those which will have to be taken in Canada.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND BANKRUPTCY LEVELS

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, does the Acting Prime Minister understand what the Prime Minister is saying? He is saying that if enough people are unemployed, if enough businesses go bankrupt, then he might persuade other Canadians to lower their expectations, and that is unconscionable. How many does the Prime Minister consider enough? Is two million unemployed enough? Is 2.5 million unemployed enough? Is 2,000 bankruptcies enough? How many does the Prime Minister consider enough before he stops his sadistic policies?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, my hon. friend is quite good at adding passion to the debate. I am trying to remain realistic on the subject. She makes a great to-do about bankruptcies. Again, if one looks at the statistics, one will realize that bankruptcies have happened in Canada regularly over the years. There were instances, for example, in 1978, when we had more than we have at the moment. While sympathizing, and being extremely aware of the difficulties in the Canadian economic situation at this time, I think one has to remain objective and try to see these issues in proper perspective. That was not what my hon. friend was doing a minute ago.

● (1425)

EFFECT OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops-Shuswap): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Acting Prime Minister who says that Canadians want to know the whole truth. I suspect that Canadians do know the truth, and they know that this group across the way is taking us to hell in a hand basket because of its economic kamikaze policies. With the present annualized

fall in our gross national product of 8 per cent, I think it has fulfilled the Prime Minister's dream and he has been successful in wrestling the economy to the ground. Will the Acting Prime Minister not agree that because of the government's policies a number of sectors of the Canadian economy are too far gone to be reclaimed? How long must this country wait? Must we find ourselves in economic ruin before the government is prepared to take some real gutsy action?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, I think that the Prime Minister's words are being distorted. What he said during the weekend was that hard measures will have to be taken and, as I quoted him a moment ago, they will not be mere tinkering. They would have real substance. I think that the rest of the words put in his mouth by previous questioners have been distortions.

Mr. Riis: It sounds as though the Acting Prime Minister agrees with the Minister of State for Economic Development when he made the great revelation on the weekend that Canadians never had it so good.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops-Shuswap): Madam Speaker, if the Prime Minister's intent is to scare the hell out of the people of Canada, suggesting that perhaps the tonic we need right now is higher unemployment—more people out of jobs—I would ask the Acting Prime Minister if creating higher unemployment is a tactic we can expect from the government in its economic war with the Canadian people? I suggest it is one of the most cynical tricks ever played by a government on its own people, if it is.

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, this gives me a good opportunity to indicate that what the Minister of State for Economic Development said during the weekend is quite different from the quotation that has been given.

Mr. Riis: That is what he said.

Mr. Pepin: Let us have a look. Even from the paper from which the quotation was taken there is the following paragraph in which the minister says:

—that things "look particularly difficult" for people who went deeply into debt because they "didn't believe there would be an end to the inflationary special . . . But the 60 to 70 per cent of the total who don't have debts probably never had it so good."

That is quite a different statement from the one my hon. friend just put to the House. I suspect that this is the sort of thing we have been hearing since the beginning of this question period. I have just indicated that in this particular instance the quotation attributed to the Minister of State for Economic Development was quite false. Reading from the very paper that reported the first part indicates that this was so. My hon. friend should not have asked the question in the manner in which he did.