

economy, boosted by consumers' confidence and the Free Trade Agreement, should continue to expand at a healthy rate over the next two years.

The OECD noted Canada's manufacturing plants are running at near capacity, while the unemployment rate dropped to a six-year low of 7.8 per cent in the first half of 1988.

Because of continuing strong business investment and profits, the jobless rate is expected to fall to 7.5 per cent by the end of this decade.

With the economy approaching full employment, we must keep a watchful eye on wages, credit expansion, and rising commodity prices, all the factors that could trigger inflation.

Four years in office has proved the ability of a Conservative Government to strengthen Canada's economy. If you think that is good, just watch us in the next four!

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

NUCLEAR POWERED SUBMARINES—COST OF PROPOSED ACQUISITION

Mr. Len Hopkins (Renfrew): Mr. Speaker, in the previous Parliament the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Beatty) announced the Government's intention to purchase 10 to 12 British or French nuclear powered submarines at a announced cost of \$5 billion before June, 1987.

The Tory Government has since revised its cost figures up to \$8 billion. However, the Business Council on National Issues estimated the cost at \$12 billion but revised it downward when it realized it was hurting its Tory friends.

United States naval experts have been saying \$10 to \$12 billion, but several experts have recently stated that a \$16 to \$20 billion estimate is a more likely figure.

During the election campaign, those nuclear subs were the quietest operating pieces of equipment you ever saw. The Tories didn't want to talk about their unpopular desire. It will take 27 or 28 years to produce all those submarines, which means that the Minister of National Defence will be happily collecting his old age pension by the time the last one goes into the water.

Oral Questions

The nuclear submarines program may well be announced quietly before this House reconvenes. If it is, it may be a sad day for Canada's Armed Forces because other areas of National Defence will go in need, all because the Minister of National Defence—

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry but the Hon. Member has exceeded his time. Oral Questions.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

THE CONSTITUTION

NOTWITHSTANDING CLAUSE—APPARENT CONTRADICTION BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER AND SECRETARY OF STATE—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, I would have liked to put my questions to the Secretary of State, but in his absence I will direct them to the Prime Minister.

The law of the land—Bill C-72—provides that the federal Government, and I quote, "is committed to enhancing the vitality and supporting the development of English and French linguistic minority communities, as an integral part of the two official language communities of Canada, and to fostering full recognition and use of English and French in Canadian society."

The Secretary of State, responsible for implementing this law, said recently that invoking the notwithstanding clause is a legal and legitimate step in that it amounts to using a mechanism included in the Canadian Constitution. As for the Prime Minister, he stated yesterday that resorting to the notwithstanding clause is a breach of the Charters of Rights and Freedoms of Canada and Québec. Mr. Speaker, the contradiction is obvious: one says white, the other says black. How can the Prime Minister continue to defend his Secretary of State who has publicly admitted he cannot do his duty, which is to promote and protect official language minority groups wherever they live?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): I find it difficult to watch Liberal Members greet this kind of question with applause, for they have always urged all their colleagues in the House to be particularly sensitive concerning linguistic issues in Canada, and always seek to avoid confrontations and create ill feelings over such questions.