

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): Through you, Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the Minister of National Revenue. Would he now give consideration to the possibility of extending the office hours of income tax offices throughout the country so it will be more convenient for citizens to appear at these offices to get the additional information they require?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Robert Stanbury (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I think this is an excellent suggestion.

An hon. Member: And a necessary one.

Mr. Stanbury: I have asked my officials to give it careful consideration. I just want them to try to be sure that the cost of doing it does not add to the burden of Canadian taxpayers too greatly.

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THE CANADIAN ECONOMY

BODY RESPONSIBLE FOR FORECASTING TRENDS

Mr. David Lewis (York South): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the right hon. Prime Minister. In view of the statement made in the House yesterday by the Minister of Finance that he has never been in the business of forecasting, would the right hon. gentleman please inform the House what ministry or other body or unit within the government is responsible for forecasting economic trends in order to assist policy-making in this area?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, as the House knows, the Economic Council of Canada under its legislative authority has a mandate—

Mr. Hees: You have never paid the slightest attention to anything they have said to you.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, I apologize, but the ebullience of some members of the House made it impossible for me to hear the Prime Minister's answer. With your permission, perhaps he might repeat it.

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I indicated that under its legislation the Economic Council of Canada was involved in the business of looking at the medium and long-term trends of the economy. Of course, the government is not without advice from its own internal advisers. We discuss these problems in cabinet and, indeed, I am sure the minister discusses them with his officials. When a budget is brought down they give the House and the country as much knowledge as possible about the economy, past, present and future.

Oral Questions

SHORT-TERM MONETARY AND FISCAL TARGETS OR OTHER TOOLS USED IN ARRIVING AT POLICIES

Mr. David Lewis (York South): Mr. Speaker, may I direct a supplementary question to the Minister of Finance arising from the fact that he seems to me to be confusing forecasting with prophesying, and no one is asking him to prophesy. I should like to ask him to indicate to the House what short-term targets he has set for his monetary and fiscal policies and, in particular, the rate of unemployment in the short term? If he has decided not to set targets, would he please inform the House what other tools he and his advisers are using for arriving at policies to manage the economy?

An hon. Member: The NDP.

Hon. John N. Turner (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, this again is a debating point. I said yesterday that certain hon. gentlemen look specifically at some of the important targets in respect of unemployment and prices but, as the Economic Council of Canada pointed out, they are all interrelated and we really should be speaking in terms of targets over a range of 14 or 15 indicators. I said as well that there is a risk that targets might be confused in the public mind with forecasts. This is very difficult to do in a vulnerable economy like Canada's where we are so influenced by interrelated trade and price movements.

An hon. Member: A vulnerable government, you mean.

• (1430)

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, I hope the Minister of Finance, when he brings down his budget, will talk a little more sense. May I ask him whether he can give the House the reason for the resignation from his department of Cyril D. Hodgins, who was director of economic analysis, and particularly—I ask this seriously—whether his resignation was a consequence of the minister's attitude toward economic targets and guiding the economy on the basis of having the courage to set economic targets?

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): That assertion of the hon. gentleman about Mr. Hodgins is unworthy of him. Mr. Hodgins left because of other opportunities and, as a matter of fact, remains in close touch with the department on a contract basis. I deny that assertion very strongly. As for my speaking sense on budget night, I will do so if the hon. member can give me the same undertaking.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, in view of the statement of the Minister of Finance a moment ago that it is difficult to make forecasts and that he was reluctant to make them, I should like to ask the minister why he forecast with such emphasis during the budget speech that more jobs would be created during 1972 than in 1971 and that food prices would go up less in 1972 than in 1971?

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the hon. gentleman play with his selective memory in the hope that he can influence the House and the country with selective recall of facts and statistics. As a matter of fact, I find that the Leader of the Opposition is playing a rather cynical game of distorted numbers.