

Oral Questions

My hon. friend refers to the document "Charting the Economic Course". She quite properly points out that unemployment remains too high in Canada.

The fact that 48,000 jobs were created last month is a very encouraging sign. The fact that 202,000 new jobs have been created since last August is also encouraging. Perhaps more encouraging is the fact that inflation is now at its lowest rate in 30 years, that interest rates are at their lowest in 20 years and that mortgage rates are at their lowest in 30 years.

I think this is good news for the economy. It promises the kinds of job creation that all members of the House in all political parties want for Canada.

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question.

For the almost 3.9 million Canadians who do not have a job or who are underemployed, I have to say to the Prime Minister that the course that this government has taken Canada on for far too many Canadians has been a shipwreck.

The pain in this country caused by unemployment was again drawn to the attention of Canadians by the message last week from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops that condemned Canada's combined unemployment and underemployment rate with one in four Canadians looking for adequate work. We will never be able to address the deficit and the debt if we do not get Canadians back working. It is something that we have been proposing for some time.

• (1430)

Will the Prime Minister look seriously at the proposals the bishops have made in terms of looking at unemployment and take this opportunity to really get Canadians back working?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, we always look very carefully at proposals from all areas, including the Catholic bishops. We have obviously considered what they have put forward.

I point out to my hon. friend that today in a story it is reported that Canadian manufacturing order books were overflowing in February as the outlook for industry continued to improve. Statistics Canada reported Monday that unfilled orders jumped by 5 per cent from January, the largest monthly rise in five years.

The Royal Bank predicted last week that real growth in Canada would be 3.5 per cent and 4 per cent in Quebec this year, and that the rest of the decade would continue to see steady growth, low inflation and healthy job growth.

The job creation is worrisome here as it is in the United States. In the United States they are referring to it as a jobless recovery. Jobs are being created but the number of people entering the work force continues to exceed that.

All industrialized countries are concerned by it, which is the result of enhanced productivity, greater investment in people and in equipment and therefore the capacity to sell products internationally. It is a double-edged sword that is before us and that we are working with very closely, which explains the programs by the Minister of Employment and Immigration to create new jobs in that sector while allowing the private sector based on exports to do the principal element of work in creating new jobs.

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question.

The fact remains that the government has choices. One is to cancel a helicopter program that we do not need, that Canada does not need.

[*Translation*]

But I would repeat that, in their pastoral message, the bishops say:

Such widespread unemployment undermines society's moral fibre and must be eliminated. It deprives workers and their families of the income required to meet their basic needs. It also deprives people of their dignity and their self-esteem.

When will this government understand the damage done by its policies, change direction and table a budget to help Canadians and their families? It is very urgent at this time and I would like to ask the Prime Minister this question.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I just said in English that the number of jobs had increased by 48,000 last month, the eighth month in a row that employment grew.

This comment from the Royal Bank of Canada is very significant: "An increase of 48,000 jobs is very encouraging. The Canadian economy has turned the corner. The annual rate of job creation has reached 1.3 per cent, the highest since the recession began". This renewed optimism led 85,000 more people to look for work last month