

*Oral Questions*

the House, which could be going within a week because, as you know, Madam Speaker, there are serious problems.

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**EXTERNAL AFFAIRS****NICARAGUA—CANADIAN SUPPORT FOR PEACE INITIATIVE**

**Miss Pauline Jewett (New Westminster-Coquitlam):** Madam Speaker, yesterday 1,600 United States troops began military activities in Honduras near that country's border with Nicaragua. Nicaragua has been under prolonged and persistent pressure from the United States and American-backed right wing rebels. This political pressure and military incursions into Nicaragua have taken a toll in civilian lives and a stragging toll on the besieged Nicaraguan economy.

The threat of invasion from Honduras continues. The Governments of Honduras and the United States continue to harbour and support anti-Nicaraguan rebels, terrorists, troop activities, and harassment of refugees. Only last month the foreign ministers of Panama, Columbia, Mexico and Venezuela met at Contadora Island in Panama and made an urgent call to all nations to:

—refrain from undertaking actions that could create the danger of generalizing the conflict throughout the region.

The Ministers said that dialogue and negotiations were the key to solving the interstate problems of Central America.

On Monday last a letter was sent to President Reagan, signed by 78 U.S. Congressmen, protesting U.S. troop presence in the region as:

—a dangerous escalation of tensions in a volatile region.

—and calling for U.S. support for the Mexican-Venezuelan peace initiatives.

Canada supports this Mexican-Venezuelan approach, and should do so enthusiastically according to the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Axworthy) who has recently returned from Central America.

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**SOCIAL SECURITY****DELAY IN MAILING OF JANUARY OLD AGE PENSION CHEQUES**

**Mr. Donald W. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich):** Madam Speaker, altogether too many elderly pensioners in the Victoria area, and probably elsewhere in British Columbia, suffered unnecessary misery and concern earlier this week—some even had to borrow to pay rents that were falling due—because of the deliberate failure of the Department of Supply and Services to mail January's pension cheques on schedule.

I urge, therefore, that the Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Blais) be required to investigate the matter immediately to ensure that such suffering and misery not be inflicted again on old age pensioners. A delay of this sort should not have happened, and should not happen again.

• (1415)

**ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**

[English]

**INDUSTRY****PETROCHEMICAL INDUSTRY—REQUEST THAT GOVERNMENT ACT TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE**

**Mr. G. M. Gurbin (Bruce-Grey):** Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of State for Economic Development, in the absence of the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. The Minister will be aware that the Canadian petrochemical industry is in serious difficulty. In eastern Canada alone this industry accounts for 9,000 direct jobs and 108,000 indirect and induced jobs. The reason the industry is in trouble is that its feedstock prices have pushed it into a non-competitive position as compared to industries in the United States and other countries. Is the Minister aware that, without immediate action, this industry will face the potential loss of 50,000 jobs, to be added to the 1.5 million or more Canadians who are now unemployed?

**Hon. Donald J. Johnston (Minister of State for Economic Development and Minister of State for Science and Technology):** Madam Speaker, I will take that question in the absence of the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. We are very much aware and sensitive to the problems of the petrochemical industry, which are certainly not unique to the industry in this country, as the Hon. Member knows. The industry is in difficulty in the United States, and in serious difficulty in Japan.

There are a number of structural reasons for this problem that faces the industry on a world-wide basis. The Government is looking at the matter on an urgent priority basis. Many of us, as I am sure the Hon. Member is aware, have received in-depth representations from industry spokesmen, and I can assure you that the Government has taken its responsibility very seriously in this regard.

**Mr. Gurbin:** That is precisely the kind of answer that we know the Government has been giving to the industry. It is precisely for that reason that we are asking these questions today.

**PRICE OF OIL FEEDSTOCK**

**Mr. G. M. Gurbin (Bruce-Grey):** Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the same Minister. The Government does not understand that it is not a question of recession, or other reasons that have been coming from the Department or the Government. This is a made-in-Canada problem. It is a problem of feedstock prices in Canada. Neither the industry, the Opposition, nor anyone else expects the Government to answer for world-wide recession problems, but it can deal with the problems that have been created in Canada and that affect Canadians.