

jobs in Canada instead of laying off workers and using Canadian taxpayers' moneys to expand in the United States.

Mr. Speaker: Such a motion can be presented for discussion, pursuant to Standing Order 43, only with the unanimous consent of the House. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: No.

● (1117)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

LABOUR CONDITIONS

RECURRING LAY-OFFS—EFFECT ON ECONOMY—GOVERNMENT ACTION

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, if I could interrupt his conversation with his Quebec lieutenant, I should like to direct a question to the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Hees: Good old bilingual Jack.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, someone across the aisle now confirms that the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce is the Quebec adviser to the Government of Canada, and I am prepared to accept that advice. My question to the Minister of Finance flows from the most recent publication of statistics by this government which indicate the failures of the policies of the government.

Today, reports from the Department of Employment and Immigration indicate that in the month of January in excess of 7,000 Canadians were laid off at plants across this country. That continues the very dangerous pattern that was evident in October, November and December and indicates, also, that the government must do something quickly to stop this pattern of lay-offs which is adding to unemployment in the country. My question to the minister is simple: What immediate action does the government intend to take to halt this dangerous pattern of lay-offs across the country?

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I prefer to have some advice from the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce on national issues, on a Friday morning, rather than the kind of advice that the Leader of the Opposition was trying to get in Quebec City last Friday. I think we are very much aware that we have some difficult economic problems in this land, and we are working very hard to try to improve the situation.

Last Friday I spoke with my colleagues, the ministers of finance of the provinces, about the general situation. There will be an economic summit with the premiers and other ministers in the next couple of weeks. They are trying to do whatever is possible to improve the situation. We stated our economic policies in October, and this month some tax cuts

Oral Questions

come into the economy. We cut income tax by \$100, for January and February, for seven million taxpayers. On January 1 we—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Chrétien: The hon. member said we do not have economic policies, Mr. Speaker, and I should like to report to him that many ministers of finance—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Clark: If I may summarize that answer, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance said that his plan is to continue to talk while plants close down across the country. He referred to his meeting with provincial ministers of finance. If press reports are correct, at that meeting he repeated his projection that there would be a rate of growth of at least 5 per cent, and perhaps 5.5 per cent, this year. I do not know of one, and I defy the minister to name any serious economist in the country who accepts that rate of growth.

What worries this House of Commons is that if the minister is wrong in this, as he has been in everything else, we are going to have deeper problems with unemployment and the economy of this country. Will the minister table in this House the projections and information from his department on which that forecast of growth rate was based?

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, we discussed those policies with officials of the Department of Finance and the Bank of Canada. We were not the only ones who predicted that Canadian growth in 1978 will be second only to Japanese growth, of all countries in the world, and will be better than all other OECD countries. We said on October 20 that the growth pattern for 1978 would be 5 per cent, and we do not have to change that figure. The Leader of the Opposition is asking if we have some company. I was quite pleased to learn that the Conference Boards of Canada and the United States predicted that the Canadian economy in 1978 would be better than any country other than Japan.

● (1122)

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, the minister is supposed to be dealing with figures. He has given a hard figure of at least 5 per cent, perhaps 5.5 per cent. Who else predicts that rate of growth for Canada? The answer is that nobody else of standing predicts that rate of growth. I am asking the Minister—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I was about to call to order the Leader of the Opposition, who had put a question and then began to answer it. I think that is extending the privileges of the question period.

Mr. Clark: A supplementary question. My reasonable request is to the Minister of Finance. Canadians who are presently unemployed, and the number is growing each month, are the ones who are interested in being assured that the