

THE ECONOMY

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX REDUCTION

Mr. David Smith (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, economic indicators continue to show that inflation is on the wane and an economic recovery is under way. Statistics Canada has reported that the Consumer Price Index rose by only .3 per cent in May, as compared to April, this reducing the increase from one year ago to 5.4 per cent. This, Madam Speaker, represents the lowest annual increase since December, 1972, and it represents a reduction of 7.5 per cent from the peak of 12.9 per cent in June, 1981. This, Madam Speaker, is irrefutable evidence of the success of the six and five program.

• (1410)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Smith: All the cynicism emanating from the other side cannot change the facts. More good news! Furthermore, the signs of an economic recovery are apparent as well. Canada had a growth rate of 1.8 per cent, inflation-adjusted, in the economy during the first quarter of 1983. That followed six quarters of decline. This is evidence, Madam Speaker, that recovery is under way.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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METRIC CONVERSION

APPLICATION TO CANNING AND PACKAGING INDUSTRY

Mr. Gordon Towers (Red Deer): Madam Speaker, in the area of metric conversion it would appear that the Metric Commission has misled the Consumers' Association of Canada. All along, the Consumers' Association of Canada, because of assurances from the Metric Commission, has been promising consumers a simpler marketplace with fewer sizes, rationally related. This was supposed to be one of the advantages of conversion. Canadian canners and packagers are unwilling to convert their equipment because of the horrendous expense, so, consequently, we have cans and packages with a lot of funny numbers which are confusing to shoppers.

If, as the Metric Commission maintains, conversion is voluntary—sector by sector—the Canadian canning and packaging industry ought to be permitted to can, package, wholesale and retail in familiar imperial measures to keep industry costs down and, in the long run, to keep costs down at the supermarket checkout counters, thereby assisting in the control of inflation and at the same time protecting our trade edge with non-metric countries, especially the United States.

S.O. 21

NATIONAL ENERGY PROGRAM

CALL FOR NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND INQUIRY INTO GASOLINE PRICING

Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River): Madam Speaker, Canadians today are suffering from the results of the Government's inept energy policies. Despite the Liberals' promises of oil prices at 75 per cent of the world price level, Canadians are now paying more at the pump than American consumers, while our oil and gas industry is in a state of chaos. Rather than helping Canadians, the National Energy Program has had a disastrous impact on the economy.

There is no doubt that Canada needs a national conference on energy pricing and taxation. Such a conference must include the federal Government, the producing Provinces, the consuming Provinces, as well as input from consumers and industry. In addition to a national conference on energy policy, there must be a national inquiry into gasoline and fuel oil pricing. No clear understanding exists today of what is a fair price for fuel, with price wars and price piggybacking going on across the country. Rather than dealing with a restrictive trade practices commission, we should have an inquiry into pricing which exists currently today. The Government must provide protection to consumers at the well head and at the gas pump. Therefore the country needs a national inquiry into the pricing procedures at the gas pump.

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[Translation]

AIR TRANSPORT

NATIONALIZATION OF QUEBECAIR—CONSEQUENCES FOR CERTAIN REGIONS OF QUEBEC

Mrs. Éva Côté (Rimouski-Témiscouata): Madam Speaker, as was mentioned earlier by our colleague for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine (Mr. Bujold), Quebecair was nationalized today by the Quebec Government. The House is aware that I represent a region that is particularly lacking in air transportation. It is also a fact that under federal legislation on air transportation, the Government of Canada is obliged to maintain transportation by air to very remote areas for which specific requirements have been identified. I wonder whether there will be any legal or moral obligation on the Government of Quebec to maintain a service in a region like ours. Madam Speaker, perhaps I may point out that the kind of gifts being offered by the Government of Quebec to the people of Quebec today are strangely similar to the gift it gave us on June 23, 1982, when it passed a basic statute that retroactively excluded the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms from all Quebec legislation. I think that this year, June 24 will be a particularly sad day for Quebec.