

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member knows that I do not comment on specific levels of the Canadian dollar. She knows the intervention policy—

Mr. Riis: It's the lowest it's been in history.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre):—of the Bank of Canada, as I have indicated to her and other Members of the House as recently as two answers ago. If she wishes to disagree with the report of the OECD, I think she will find that there are many more people who would disagree with her than she has indicated.

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REFUGEES

INCREASE IN NUMBER OF CLAIMANTS FOR REFUGEE STATUS

Mr. Dan Heap (Spadina): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of State for Immigration to whom I gave notice by telephone this morning. As the Minister knows, since the Supreme Court declared ten months ago that the Charter forbids the Canadian Government to deny refugee status to anyone without an oral hearing, the number of refugee claimants in Canada has mushroomed from 14,000 to over 20,000.

When will the Minister take action on the recommendations of the Sixth Report of the Standing Committee on Labour, Employment and Immigration, which was tabled last December, and which recommended just, speedy, and compassionate administrative measures for clearing up the backlog of refugees and reducing the delay, thereby taking away the motivation for the racket of phoney refugee claims?

Hon. Walter McLean (Minister of State (Immigration)): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the Hon. Member for his question. I want to assure him that the sixth report which was tabled in the House on December 19 is being studied by myself and by my colleagues. We are looking at the whole matter of the backlog and at a new refugee determination system on an urgent basis.

I wish to commend the members of the committee for their very thorough analysis of this troubling issue and to assure them that their recommendations will be very useful especially at this time, as we bring proposals before the House.

VISA REQUIREMENT FOR PORTUGUESE VISITORS

Mr. Dan Heap (Spadina): Mr. Speaker, can the Minister, then, assure the House that he will not consider imposing a visa requirement on visitors from Portugal, at least until he has taken these just measures to reduce the backlog of refugee claimants and so cut the motivation out from under this phoney racket of refugee claims?

Hon. Walter McLean (Minister of State (Immigration)): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member raises the issue of a number of people who at this moment claim to be refugees and who are

asking for those claims to be tested. I wish to assure the Hon. Member that I have been in close contact with the Portuguese community and that the action of the Government at this time is on those who are encouraging fraudulent claims. I appreciate very much the support of the Portuguese community, and also the support of all communities involved in identifying these abuses. I am now gathering information in that regard and where appropriate prosecutions may be undertaken.

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HOUSING

INCREASED STARTS AND SALES IN 1985

Mr. Bob Hicks (Scarborough East): Mr. Speaker, my question today is directed to the Minister responsible for Canada Mortgage and Housing. It centres around a recent statement published by the Toronto Home Builders' Association that there was a 71.5 per cent increase in the sale of new homes in the Toronto area in 1985. Can the Minister explain to Canadians how this amazing increase took place? Does he feel that it might just be a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member brings an increase in sales to the attention of the House. I would also like to say to the Hon. Member that home starts in the last year were up 21 per cent over the previous year. That is as a result of the economic and financial handling of the economy by the Minister of Finance and this Government.

Mr. Frith: What about the dollar?

Mr. McKnight: The Hon. Member should know that barely into the second year of the mandate of this Government it has created 44,000 more jobs than the Liberal Government created in four and a half years—44,000 more.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McKnight: Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons for those sales happens to be because interest rates are 2.5 percentage points lower than they were on election day in 1984. Another reason is because the unemployment rate has gone down since 1984—

Mr. Boudria: Thank you!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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INSURANCE

SOLVENCY OF INSURANCE COMPANIES

Mr. Alfonso Gagliano (Saint-Léonard-Anjou): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. Yesterday the