

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 11, 1991

The House met at 1 p.m.

Prayers

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY, S. O. 81—THE ECONOMY

Mr. Jim Peterson (Willowdale) moved:

That this House condemn the government for:

- (1) maintaining a high interest/high dollar policy that gives foreigners a continuing competitive advantage over Canadian producers;
- (2) cutting support for export promotion, science and technology and research and development, thereby accelerating Canada's slide into non-competitiveness; and
- (3) its economic mismanagement that has caused record bankruptcies, put 1.4 million Canadians out of work and brought about the deindustrialization of Canada, especially Ontario.

He said: Several days ago in my riding of Willowdale I had an experience which I know members from all sides of this House have had. It is not a unique experience for me in terms of my experience in my riding of Willowdale. A gentleman who is 51 years of age, has a university education and has worked every day of his life, is an expert on computers, came into my office and said: "Mr. Peterson, I have been out of work now for six months. I cannot find a job. No one is hiring. Everyone is laying off people. What can you do to help me?"

Mr. Speaker, all of us have experienced this tragic event, tragic in terms of the human questions involved. This individual had a house, three children who are going to school—two of them in university—he had a mortgage to pay, he had a car loan to pay. He had to give up the payments on his car; he did not know how much

longer he was going to be able to continue carrying his mortgage.

This is one of the great tragedies which occurs when we have a downturn in our economy. This is why we, as members of this House, realize that we have a beholden duty to our constituents to try to do everything possible to maintain jobs and the strength of our economy in Canada.

We have seen first-hand, all of us, the devastation that can be wreaked on individuals, on families, on municipalities, caused by unemployment and the present downturn in our economy.

This gentleman said to me: "Mr. Peterson, what can we do, what are the answers?" Our economic circumstances are extremely complicated, but I believe this government has made choices since it has come into office. We on this side of the House want to hold the government accountable to every Canadian for the choices it has made.

• (1310)

Let us look at the facts of what the Tories have accomplished in their seven years of running this economy. In 1984 our current account balance had a \$2.7 billion surplus. Last year this had fallen to a \$16 billion deficit. In terms of our trade with other countries, and Canada is a trading nation, in 1984 we had a surplus of \$19.8 billion. Last year it had fallen to \$10.8 billion.

What has happened? Why have we degenerated in terms of our ability to compete on the world markets? I give the Minister of Finance credit for recognizing our declining world competitiveness, having mentioned it in his last budget.

In February 1986, about the time that this government was entering into free trade discussions with the United States, the Canadian dollar was at a low of 69.13 cents *vis-à-vis* the American dollar. In August of last year the dollar reached 88.58 cents. That is more than a 28 per cent increase in five short years in the value of our dollar. Every one of our Canadian producers, especially our exporters, will confirm that the most devastating