

Oral Questions

My question is directed to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. Would such farfetched statements not seriously compromise the credibility of the finance minister and are they not a definite indication that panic has struck the federal side?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister was right. He said there are one million jobs in Quebec that are affected by export industries, including those that export to the rest of Canada, and that Quebec's separation would create considerable problems in this area.

What he said was perfectly true and is supported by the statistics. It is an indication of the extremely negative economic consequences of Quebec's separation.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, would the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs not agree that his colleague in the Finance Department has gone too far by taking such an irresponsible approach, since his responsibility and first duty as finance minister is to avoid any statements that might cause a negative reaction on the financial markets?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister also has a duty to point out what would really happen if Quebec separated.

In his role as finance minister, he has an obligation to point out that separation will not only cost us hundreds of thousands of jobs, as the leader of the no committee said, but also that many jobs would be affected by changes occurring subsequent to separation, and particularly by the fact that, as the finance minister pointed out, Quebec would have to renegotiate its entry in NAFTA and the successor organization to GATT.

These are aspects that will create substantial economic problems in Quebec and, once again, the finance minister has a duty to point this out to Quebecers.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs not realize that the finance minister's apocalyptic speech, which was actually received with some scepticism by industrial development advisers, gets us nowhere and is in fact oddly similar to the speeches they made on free trade a few years ago, and which subsequently turned out to be all wrong?

• (1420)

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.): Mr.

Speaker, the supporters of the yes committee, which includes the Bloc Québécois, would have Quebecers believe that separation will take place without a hitch, without any negative economic consequences, without any impact on Quebec's relations with the rest of Canada, the United States and Mexico.

That is not true, and it is not enough to wave a magic wand and say "Poof! Let the problems vanish!" for them to vanish.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Massé: The truth is that separation will create tremendous problems, it will affect investment in Quebec, jobs and exports. Whatever the Bloc and the PQ say, it is important to get the truth out and that Quebecers know on October 30 what the real consequences will be of separation.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs.

In an effort to add weight to his apocalyptic speech, the Minister of Finance claimed that business in Quebec would no longer be able to export to the United States, as if a veritable great wall of China was going to be built around Quebec.

Will the minister not acknowledge that, the day after a yes vote, American and Canadian businesses will not want to lose their privileged access to Quebec markets and that this unavoidable reality makes the apocalyptic scenario of the Minister of Finance completely ridiculous?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that there is no guarantee at all of this in the event a yes vote.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister should know that the Americans will be looking for stability in their trading with Canada and Quebec the day after a yes vote.

Does the minister not agree that nothing will better ensure the stability that the United States, and Canada as well, will be looking for than Quebec's early entry into NAFTA, as a number of American experts have already pointed out.

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, only a no vote will ensure Canada's economic and commercial stability.

Today, the figures are coming out. In the month of August, Canada had an all time record volume of foreign trade.

[English]

In the month of August there was the highest ever increase in real exports from Canada to countries around the world. The best way to protect the interests of Quebecers and Canadians in selling our goods around the world is to keep Canada together.