

Oral Questions

● (1442)

TRADE

CANADA-UNITED STATES AUTO PACT—ACTION TO ENSURE GREATER PRODUCTION OF PARTS IN CANADA

Mr. Max Saltsman (Waterloo-Cambridge): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. It arises out of the news released yesterday that the ten month trade deficit on auto trade with the United States had reached a new high of \$969 million, which is some 38 per cent higher than at the same time last year and that this deficit arises chiefly because of a whopping deficit of \$2.2 billion on our parts trade with the United States. In light of the fact that this continuing deficit means a loss of jobs that has been estimated to be in the range of 20,000 and that it is likely to get larger, can the minister be specific in telling the House what success he has had in convincing the major auto makers to either manufacture or buy more of their auto parts in Canada, particularly since the devaluation of the Canadian dollar has made our industry that much more competitive?

Hon. Jack H. Horner (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, nothing would please me more than to be specific. However, talks with the three major auto manufacturers are still going on. As yet, no conclusion has been reached. Some of them are interested in expanding their automobile plants. They have not yet determined whether that will be in Canada or the United States. However, negotiations are continuing. We are aware of the deficit in parts manufacturing. I have spoken on this subject many times in the House. All I can say is that in the spirit of this time of the year, we hope we can reach a conclusion before the new year.

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INDUSTRY

APPARENT REFUSAL OF ANACONDA TO SELL CANADIAN PLANT—GOVERNMENT ACTION

Mr. Max Saltsman (Waterloo-Cambridge): Mr. Speaker, may I give the minister a chance to be specific in a case with which I know he is familiar. In connection with the growing auto trade deficit, it is my understanding that the minister's department has been involved in the attempt to find a buyer for the Anaconda plant in Toronto which makes radiator parts and other auto components, which will be forced to close down, with the loss of some 750 to 800 jobs unless a buyer suitable to the American parent is found. Rumours abound that several potential buyers for the plant have been found, but that the American parent would prefer to simply close the plant rather than face a potential competitor if the plant were to continue to operate and export to the American market. What has the minister done to attempt to find a buyer? In light of the fact that the plant is, potentially, a major exporter of parts to the American market and a major employer, can the minister say what he plans to do if the American parent

[Mr. MacEachen.]

continues to refuse to sell? This is an indication of why we are having this problem of deficits.

Hon. Jack H. Horner (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, I met with the management of the Anaconda plant and the union leaders at that plant some months ago. We were able to convince the parent company to keep the plant open until next April to give us time to find a buyer for the plant. It is now my understanding that the owners of the Anaconda plant have contacted an agency and, in essence, have put the plant up for sale. We have a couple of interested buyers. We are doing everything we can to assist with the successful transfer of ownership of the Anaconda plant in the hope of keeping it in production in Canada.

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HEALTH

REASON FOR REFUSAL TO TAKE ACTION ON MERCURY POISONING—PROPOSED REFERENCE TO COMMITTEE OF REPORT OF SCIENCE COUNCIL

Mr. J. R. Holmes (Lambton-Kent): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. It is related to the serious problem of mercury poisoning, in particular among our native people. It relates to the recent figures of December 5 which revealed that 56 individuals had mercury levels above 50 parts per million. In the October report "Policies and Poisons" published by the Science Council of Canada, they stated and I quote:

In respect of mercury, the scientific community was asked to prove damage before action was taken, whereas more commonly, the demonstration of the existence of a hazard has provoked action, for example with vinyl chloride.

I would like to ask the minister how she can justify, for example, the banning of saccharin on the basis of rat studies, or the action taken to control the hazards of vinyl chloride, and yet refuse to take meaningful action with respect to mercury poisoning with the knowledge that cases of Minimata disease exists.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to inform the House that on the contrary we are going to sign within a few days an agreement on a research project in which, incidentally, we will have the participation of the Quebec government, of McGill University and of various associations representing the Indian communities of Quebec, which proves that we are very much interested in research related to the control of mercury poisoning.

[*English*]

Mr. Holmes: Mr. Speaker, that has to be one of the most irresponsible answers I have heard yet.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Holmes: May I simply say to the minister—