

Oral Questions

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, my officials are in Windsor this week talking to Chrysler. I understand that Chrysler is to shut down one old truck plant. In the last two years they have spent \$43 million in overhauling their new truck plant. They hope there will be no loss of jobs and that they will be able to accommodate the workers from the old truck plant in the new truck plant.

[Translation]

GENERAL MOTORS—POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING FOUNDRY
IN CANADA

Mr. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. The minister will recognize that, under the auto pact, our country is now facing an increasing deficit as concerns automotive parts, but according to certain information, it seems that General Motors would be very interested in establishing a large foundry in Canada. Can the minister tell the House if he has had personal negotiations with officials of this company concerning the building of a foundry in Canada in the near future?

● (1422)

[English]

Hon. Jack H. Horner (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times in this House, we are carrying on negotiations with the Big Three automobile manufacturers. They are considering a foundry such as the hon. member speaks of. For me to comment on it now would perhaps hinder, rather than help the negotiations. I know the hon. member wants to see the negotiations come to a successful conclusion. For me to intervene now and say something publicly would not help.

[Translation]

Mr. La Salle: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the minister responsible for these negotiations if there still is a possibility of a major foundry being established in Canada by General Motors, which would make us very happy, and can he tell us if he has recommended any locations for this project? If so, can he say where this foundry could be built in Canada?

[English]

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, many areas are being considered. Here, again, I do not believe the government should decide where it is to be. We have placed before General Motors the options available to them in Canada, and we are awaiting their decision.

ANNOUNCED CLOSING OF CHRYSLER PLANT IN WINDSOR—
INCREASE IN UNEMPLOYMENT

Mr. John Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. At 11.30 this morning the city of Windsor was informed by Chrysler Corporation that it was closing its truck plant, thus

[Mr. Kempling.]

creating unemployment of 800 in the Windsor area, in July of this year. When did the minister first become aware that that plant might be closing, what consultation did his department undertake with Chrysler Corporation, and what steps does he intend to take to keep the plant operating in the Windsor area?

Hon. Jack H. Horner (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): As I said, Mr. Speaker, my officials have been in Windsor all week discussing Chrysler's hopes and expectations with regard to that truck plant. It is not for my officials to say the truck plant is old and needs a complete overhaul, or that a new plant will not do the same work as the old plant is doing. As I said earlier, Chrysler has spent \$43 million on a new truck plant and hopes to accommodate the workers laid off at the old plant.

Mr. Rodriguez: The new branch plant is operating at almost full capacity at the moment; therefore, it will not be able to absorb another 800 workers. Chrysler Corporation is building a plant in Jefferson, in the United States, to replace the old truck plant. In view of the fact this government forgave \$17.5 million in duties which were owed by Chrysler up to 1975 because they failed to meet their commitment under the auto pact for the production of trucks in Canada, what steps does the minister intend to take to protect those 800 jobs now, and to make sure that Chrysler does not again default in its commitments, having already received a gift of \$17.5 million from the taxpayers of Canada?

Mr. Horner: I like the hon. member's term "use force" to force Chrysler. We are in a free society. We can encourage. As I have said many times, I do not particularly want to do away with the automotive agreement. My understanding is that the workers who are laid off now will receive 90 per cent of what they are earning. We will have to wait and see whether Chrysler can accommodate them in a new plant. They are merely on a temporary lay-off now and will receive 90 per cent of their salary.

Mr. Rodriguez: Whenever we on this side of the House ask the government to do something beneficial for Canadians we are accused of forcing the company. However, when they announce sudden lay-offs they are never accused of forcing our hand. They are holding the taxpayers up to blackmail. That is absolutely callous on the part of the government. There are now rumours in Windsor of the same sort that preceded today's announcement, that Chrysler will soon be shutting down its six-cylinder operation in that city.

Can the minister tell this House exactly what meaningful consultation is going on with the company? Is he being kept aware of the company's plans? Has his department approved any further shutdowns or been informed of any further shutdowns by Chrysler? Is the minister going to simply sit there and say "There's nobody here but us chickens"?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to run down every rumour that I hear with regard to a shutdown of a plant. I would like to add to what I have already said that most of the