

Oral Questions

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENTINQUIRY WHETHER AGREEMENT WILL BE MADE BETWEEN
PRATT & WHITNEY, MONTREAL, AND UNIONS

Hon. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Madam Speaker, my question is also directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. The minister is aware of the substantial and generous government contributions and subsidies received by Pratt & Whitney in Montreal. Despite these subsidies, the company has been obliged to lay off over 1,500 employees, and although the minister has set up a new work-sharing program and the unions seem to be very interested, there is still no agreement with the company on this matter. Since the government, in subsidizing this company, has a certain responsibility, would the minister, for the sake of all the employees involved, be prepared to send one of his officials to make a special effort to conclude an agreement between the company and the unions, and thus prevent the loss of thousands of jobs?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, the discussions between the management of Pratt & Whitney, the union officials and the government have been ongoing now for several weeks. The whole essence of the work-sharing program is based upon the voluntary co-operation of the three major partners. We cannot compel either management or the union to come into an agreement; it must be based upon their willingness to come into that agreement.

We have signed a work-sharing arrangement with the office workers of Pratt & Whitney. It is really up to the union and management to overcome their own jurisdictional disputes as to who is included in the voting arrangements in order for the work-sharing to apply to the general work force. We are providing a member of our manpower consultative services, a separate division of my department, to try to bring that agreement about. We will continue to work with them at any time, but it is based upon mutual co-operation between the three partners. We would ask the hon. member to use his good offices to help that agreement come about. It would be a very important support and assistance for the workers there, if they could get the work-sharing agreement signed.

[Translation]

PRATT & WHITNEY—REQUEST THAT MEASURES BE TAKEN TO
MEET WISHES OF UNION MEMBERSHIP

Hon. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Madam Speaker, I understand the principle the minister has just explained. However, the fact remains that I am referring to a company that practically owes its survival to government subsidies. Since the union—and my information gives me every reason to believe this—is in favour of the program created recently by the minister, and considering that the government has an obligation to show some concern for Pratt & Whitney, could the

minister in some way urge the company to be more receptive to the wishes of union members?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, without taking the time of the House to go into the full details, I do not think it is as necessarily clear-cut that one side is in the wrong and the other side is in the right. It is a dispute about who is to be involved in the voting jurisdiction which would apply to the work-sharing agreement. That is really a matter of collective bargaining between the parties. While the government can facilitate, support and encourage, I do not think it wants to impose.

We are using our good offices to try to bring about that arrangement. I know the hon. member from that area, the hon. member for Longueuil, has provided a lot of support in that regard. I appreciate his help and assistance. We will continue to work with them. If the hon. member would also provide his good offices, I am sure we could bring the two parties to that dispute to the table and to an agreement and provide the kind of outcome we all want to achieve.

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THE ECONOMY

PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH IN VANCOUVER

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. Yesterday in Vancouver he threatened Canadians that he would stay on until economic circumstances improved.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: I see the Prime Minister has three supporters behind him, anyway. Since he came to office, unemployment has almost doubled and inflation has almost tripled. I would like to ask the Prime Minister why he thinks the people of Canada would turn for a solution to a man who created the problem? Is it not like asking the arsonist to put out the fire?

● (1425)

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, the hon. Leader of the New Democratic Party has quoted some figures about inflation doubling, and so on. During that period the wealth of Canada more than tripled. That should be something which could influence some of the people who are interested in knowing whether I am available or not.

Mr. Broadbent: I would suggest that the people of Canada know that the wealth of virtually every country has improved in the last 14 years, but they are more concerned about the million and a half unemployed in this country, which is a direct result of Liberal government policy.