

• (1450)

Mr. David Walker (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I respect the constitutional niceties that the Minister of Justice finds himself in, but Canadian society is changing and many groups are facing racial discrimination. For example, in addition to the group I mentioned in my previous question, the Sikh community is facing the problem of racial pins and anti-Sikh calendars.

What specific measures is the minister taking? Is he initiating federal-provincial conferences? Is he reviewing the Criminal Code? Is he meeting with the attorneys general across the country? Is he doing something to help Canadians feel they are not being discriminated against?

Hon. Doug Lewis (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I am sure my hon. friend knows that my colleague, the Secretary of State, has several programs under way with respect to this matter.

Mrs. Campbell (South West Nova): Money.

Mr. Lewis: You don't throw money at everything and fix it that way; you've to get to people's minds.

I would also point out that the Supreme Court of Canada presently has the hate propaganda legislation before it. It would be premature to make any changes in the law until we see what the Supreme Court of Canada suggests.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

Mr. Speaker: I wish to draw to members' attention the presence in the gallery of Jana Petrova, member of the Federal Assembly of Czechoslovakia.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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INVESTMENT CANADA

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for Investment Canada.

In a letter from the Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade in Manitoba dated December 22, 1989, bearing the wording "Confidential—Privileged Information" with

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regard to the Johnson Controls takeover of Varta Batteries Ltd., the Deputy Minister stated:

I strongly object to the acquisition unless there are commitments to maintain or to enhance the Manitoba employment base.

The letter goes on to say:

The Winnipeg plant of Varta Batteries Ltd. is a significant and important component of the Manitoba economy, and closure is not an acceptable course of action.

Why did neither the federal government nor the provincial government inform the workers that their jobs were being sacrificed in this American takeover? Further, why did the federal government completely ignore the secret pleas of the Manitoba government to keep this plant open?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion and Minister of State for Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, the Varta plant that was taken over was in financial difficulties and in fact was on the verge of bankruptcy. Had that occurred of course the jobs would be lost, but lost in a circumstance where there would not be severance packages available and the kind of assistance that is available under a more orderly shutdown.

The purchase by Johnson Controls provided for a more orderly shutdown. There was an offer of jobs, admittedly in another province, but nevertheless for some of the employees there was that offer, and there were the usual reasonable accommodations made for the employees who were leaving.

Any time Investment Canada is faced with a merger situation it consults the provinces affected. It consulted, not in any secret way, the province of Manitoba. If there were significant reasons given by Manitoba why this should not be allowed to go ahead or if they had alternatives then those would be listened to, but I am not aware of any such thing having occurred.

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, I again refer the minister to the letter which was sent in confidence—it was privileged information—to Investment Canada on December 22, 1989.

In addition to that, when the sale finally became public in February the company said that it cost too much to send 400,000 batteries to eastern Canada. Was the government aware that that same company is now going to have to send 400,000 batteries to western Canada? That information was not available because the workers were never consulted. Why were they not consulted?