

at the Prime Minister's dinner, there were 450 people who listened attentively to what he had to say about the GST.

As a result of the Prime Minister's speech, they realized the benefits of the GST and how it will improve our ability to export, and how it will put Canadian producers on a level playing field with importers. Importers now have one-third less tax to pay than the Canadian producers. Also, they learned how it will help the farm community by giving them a full rebate on tax on all farm inputs. These are the benefits that are going to be gained by various sectors in the economy.

I will always come back to the same point. I have listened carefully to what hon. members in the Liberal Party have to say about the GST. They are full of complaints, but they do not have one alternative. They do not know where to go. If we said today, "No GST", they would have their mouths absolutely wide open with nothing to say because they do not know what the alternatives are.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg—St. James): Mr. Speaker, the minister says there were 450 at the meeting. Yes, but they were all carefully selected.

The Minister of Finance will be debating the GST with our finance critic in Edmonton on March 5, but the tickets are by invitation only and they are going to cost \$100. That, to me, is an outrage.

• (1440)

I want to ask the finance minister whether he would consider attending another meeting in Edmonton the same day, where the admission price might be free so that ordinary Canadians do not feel locked out of the process and where they can put their questions and concerns directly to the finance minister? It seems to me that if the finance minister wants to elaborate on the GST this will be an excellent opportunity for him.

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the thoughtfulness of the hon. member. He should know that that particular debate is going to be on national television. Surely that is going to give Canadians from coast to coast an opportunity to listen and see the nature of the debate.

Mr. Harvard: Another selected audience.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Hon. members would like me to respond to questions. I have been on many,

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many open line shows, coast to coast. The week before I am going to be on three open line shows in British Columbia. I believe I am going to be on an open line show in Edmonton the same day as the debate on March 5. I am happy to do this on an ongoing basis because I have confidence that the GST is right for this country. It is going to put our country in a more competitive position. It will also avoid \$2 billion worth of tax avoidance.

Now if the Liberal Party of Canada is in favour of \$2 billion of tax avoidance, it is great to hear it because these are the things that we have been trying to stamp out for the last five and a half years, and we have been making good strides in doing so.

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INDUSTRY

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion. I met today with workers from Varta Batteries Investment Canada. Some 175 workers face job losses in Winnipeg because of the U.S. takeover and shutdown at Varta.

Investment Canada admitted that its review had not taken account of the spin-off job losses at Canada Medals and Reliance Plastics. I want to ask the Minister how he can possibly justify a decision which did not take into account these important points in terms of economic impact.

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion and Minister of State for Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, this particular company was losing substantial amounts of money and it was simply a case of their going bankrupt if we did not allow someone to purchase them. I suppose we could have nationalized them, but if that is what he is advocating we will take a look at it. The alternatives were very limited because of the financial situation of that company.

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the Manitoba government claimed that some workers from Winnipeg would be transferred as part of this takeover to the remaining St. Thomas plant which was going to be kept in operation. But this week we learned that 35 workers at the St. Thomas plant have also been given layoffs.

Why has the minister approved a takeover and a shutdown which has lost us one plant in the west and is losing us jobs here in Ontario? Is this not simply a case of