

Oral Questions

FTA will affect food processing jobs, family farms and access to affordable food in Canada and Mexico.

Speakers will include spokespersons of the Canadian Autoworkers Union, Miguel D'Escoto, a former Nicaraguan minister of external affairs, a leading opposition member of the Mexican Congress and a leading Mexican economist, members of the Canadian Parliament for Surrey North and for Oshawa, and Tony Clark, chair of Action Canada, on why renegotiations will not work and how to build for cancellation of the FTA and NAFTA.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[*English*]

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask a question of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

Every day this week members of the Liberal Party have risen in the House to plead with the government not to abandon Canada's unemployed. We talk about the lack of mobility assistance, adequate training dollars, job availability, and what not.

Today the Canadian Mental Health Association said that as unemployment rises in Canada there are increases in infant mortality, suicide, murder, spouse and child abuse, family breakdown, and so on.

When will the Minister of Finance start to consider that this never-ending recession which has been going on now for more than 27 months is hurting all Canadians very badly and the time has come to change his policies?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, the hon. member refers to the Canadian Mental Health Association report. Are we going to lead Canadians down the path of only doom and gloom?

If he wants to compare the rates of suicide, family break-ups, alcoholism and drug abuse and tie them to the unemployment rate, I invite him—and I am not saying it has no affect—to compare it with other countries in the world where there are rampant problems in that area.

The answer is not to try to blame unemployment for everything. We should, rather, maybe join other Canadians under this prosperity initiative and try to identify ways where we can improve this situation. That is what the government is doing.

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, I would like to point out to the hon. minister that yesterday one of his colleagues in this House, the member for Halifax West, said: "One of the things that you learn in an election is not to bother with welfare houses".

Was he reflecting the views of that party and that government not to care for the people who are suffering in society and who have lost their dignity because they cannot find jobs? When will this government put on a human face and repudiate that awful statement by the member of Halifax West?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, if words mean anything, the leader of the Liberal Party stood on January 21 and called for a great one-year emergency economic plan. Do you know what he suggested for unemployed Canadians? He suggested that the Government of Canada should increase its training funding by a meagre \$150 million.

We are providing 20 times that amount each year for unemployed Canadians. The Liberals should come clean with Canadians and tell them what they really think.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, I simply wanted to say to the minister that the problem is not going away. One and a half million Canadians are out of work, and we now know that more than 600,000 Canadians have left the labour market and have given up on finding a job. This means that 1.5 million people have lost their dignity in Canada because they cannot work and that 600,000 more Canadians have given up altogether and may be too embarrassed to go out and look for work, because this government refuses to give them a chance to earn a living, to live with some dignity and to be proud citizens of this country.

• (1120)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, I do not know why the Leader of the Opposition keeps saying this government has no consideration for the unemployed and is not