

*Oral Questions*

Does the Minister for International Trade intend to cut human and financial resources allocated to the promotion of trade with the U.S. and reduce the number of trade commissioners, as suggested by Liberal senators and members of Parliament on the special joint committee?

[English]

**Hon. Roy MacLaren (Minister for International Trade, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in Canada's search for additional international markets it is not in any way our intention to play down opportunities in the United States. They are real, they are tangible and of course they represent the greatest part of our foreign trade.

Our programs of support range across a whole spectrum. Some relate to the border states for example. Some relate to small and medium sized enterprises entering the export world for the first time, principally in the United States. It is our intention to continue to support those programs.

[Translation]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister claims that he cares about human rights; why in that case did he not see fit to raise this issue during his meeting with Central American leaders, including the President of Guatemala, a country denounced by Amnesty International for its systematic violation of human rights?

• (1435)

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I raised this kind of issue several times whenever circumstances allowed it. In fact, I raised this very issue, in the presence of the President of Guatemala, at the breakfast meeting we had with the six Central American government leaders.

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[English]

### SOCIAL PROGRAMS

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the report tabled by the human resources development committee offered the curious vision that social programs are working brilliantly yet they are desperately in need of reform.

Almost all of the recommendations are based on three false assumptions: that governments create jobs through ever increasing public spending; that a government monopoly is the best means of caring for those in need; and that ever increasing government debts and deficits are justifiable if they are spent on government run, make work projects and social programs.

Last week the Minister of Human Resources Development told the news media that deficit reduction had overtaken social

program reform as the top priority. Can the minister tell Canadians if he will proceed with social program reform only if he can spend more money and control program delivery?

**Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is obvious the hon. member was so busy reading his own minority report that he did not bother to look carefully at the majority report.

It very directly says we must put social reform in the context of a stable fiscal economic system because we have to build upon that base of stability. This is something we are certainly favouring because we do believe that part of social reform is to have a well functioning economy which is not subject to the kind of vulnerabilities and volatility we are now receiving in the international finance market.

Beyond that it said it is very important to look at many of the existing programs and shift resources for those programs to much more active employment development so that we can get people back to work. After all, the ultimate strength of our economy is to have more Canadians going back to work. That is how we will build this country, by investing in people.

**The Speaker:** Once again colleagues, it is early in the year but I would appeal to you to make the questions brief and the answers brief.

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, if the government would get its fiscal house in order there would be a lot less need for social programs.

I travelled with the Commons committee for five weeks. Many ordinary Canadians I heard were not saying the things that are in this report. It is obvious the government is paralysed because it has spent too much time listening to government funded special interest groups.

Can the minister tell us, is his government going to continue the Liberal tradition of social programs dominated by decisions made in Ottawa and make promises it cannot keep and add to the worry of average Canadians because of its lack of vision?

**Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the vision we put forward in the social paper was to ensure that a wide range of Canadians would be able to fully participate in the process.

I am glad to report that well over 100,000 Canadians participated mainly through the efforts of members of Parliament who held town hall meetings, through the work of the committee itself and through the effective work of the department in getting out workbook questionnaires. It probably has been the largest exercise of public involvement in any decision on public policy.