

Oral Questions

Mr. Speaker, the committees to safeguard jobs in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and Valleyfield submitted a petition with 40,000 signatures to the Minister yesterday, but were not informed by the Minister when he intends to announce measures to protect the textile industry and the jobs affected in these two towns.

Has the Minister received the final report of the Textile and Clothing Commission on the subject, and when does the Government intend to announce its new policy to save jobs in Canada's textile industry?

[English]

Hon. Sinclair Stevens (Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion): Mr. Speaker, you will recall that the Hon. Member asked a similar question yesterday when I informed him that I was to meet yesterday afternoon with representatives from the group, including union leaders, management personnel, and mayors of towns. I did meet with them. I think that we had a meaningful discussion at which time they gave us their viewpoints. I think they understand the difficulty. This is the decision of a private company. I did meet with Tom Bell of Dominion Textile. We have discussed the over-all health of the industry. I want to assure the Hon. Member and the House that the Government certainly intends to come out with a policy which will ensure that there will be a viable textile and clothing industry in Canada.

[Translation]

INQUIRY WHEN NEW POLICY WILL BE ANNOUNCED

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, is the Minister aware of the fact that 800 employees, whose jobs are at stake and who are affected by the shutdowns announced by Domtex in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and Valleyfield, that these employees feel as though they were being held hostage by the company, which may be intending to leave Canada, and are there going to be any changes in our textile policy? How much longer is the Government going to penalize these employees, whose jobs are at stake, and when exactly are you going to announce your new policy for the textile industry?

[English]

Hon. Sinclair Stevens (Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion): Mr. Speaker, when the Hon. Member says that we were aware, of course we were aware. We were aware long before he started to show an interest in this question. He is simply playing catch-up and trying to make a few political points on something which, frankly, is a serious situation. We are working with industry and union leaders to ensure that there is a proper solution which will overcome some of the unemployment which is developing in the industry.

APARTHEID

COMMONWEALTH COMMUNIQUÉ

Mr. Barry Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, my question is addressed to the Secretary of State for External Affairs. I would like to welcome the Minister back from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Does the Minister feel that the compromise communiqué issued concerning sanctions against South Africa is a strong enough signal from the Commonwealth to break down immediately apartheid in South Africa?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member who has taken a consistent interest in this question. I think that the consensus achieved at Nassau at the Commonwealth Conference was particularly remarkable, given the divisions which existed prior to the convening of that meeting. I think it maintained the steady pressure against apartheid which Canada wants to see maintained. I should say, Mr. Speaker, that I believe all Canadians can take pride in the pivotal and essential role which was played in achieving that consensus by the Prime Minister of Canada.

● (1200)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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AGRICULTURE

SITUATION IN POTATO INDUSTRY

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Agriculture. He knows that the potato farmers in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island are facing the worst year in their history due to the service charge and inspection fees which were imposed by the Government, and due as well to prices which are running at half of the production costs.

Is the Minister willing to make a commitment today to institute a potato purchase program under the Agricultural Products Act to assist these producers? And is he willing to withdraw the inspection fees which he has imposed this year for the first time in history?

Hon. John Wise (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the observations of the Hon. Member with respect to the increased inspection fees are somewhat exaggerated because the Hon. Member will know that I personally negotiated with just about all of the commodity groups and we reached mutually satisfactory increase levels. Of course, these increases will be phased in gradually, as they should be.

I know the Hon. Member does not exaggerate the very tight situation he describes in the potato industry, not only in the