

Oral Questions

● (1440)

[English]

REQUEST FOR LIMITATION ON ASSESSMENT OF BACK TAXES

Mr. Lorne Greenaway (Cariboo-Chilcotin): Madam Speaker, clearly the Minister does not really understand the problem or the gravity of the situation. There are many, many farmers who are literally facing bankruptcy because of this auditing process going on right now across the country. As I pointed out in my previous question, many of them are being assessed up to four years back taxes. In 1972, when this problem came up, the then Minister of Revenue allowed people to be assessed back taxes only for the current year. Would the Minister agree to that, to assess back taxes only for the current year if people are going to be reassessed under Section 31?

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Bussières (Minister of National Revenue): Madam Speaker, I challenge the Hon. Member to show me cases of farmers who really run an agricultural operation, who get their income from farms which generate revenues, and who are having problems because of Section 31. I challenge him to show me such cases, for I would be quite prepared to examine them closely. However, I want to point out to him that I make a distinction between an individual who earns an income from an operation other than a farm, but who owns a farm or a piece of land which he works as a hobby or as a second or third occupation during this leisure time and who wants to deduct his expenses incurred in that activity from his income earned from another source. To my mind, that is a very significant distinction to make and I would not call that individual a farmer.

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[English]

INDUSTRY

CLOSURE OF CONSOLIDATED BATHURST PLANT IN HAMILTON

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. The Consolidated Bathurst Company closed its plant in Hamilton today. Many of the workers who have worked there for over 20 years made an offer to Consolidated in Montreal to purchase the plant and equipment. The offer was turned down because the Company did not want the competition.

Given that this is not an isolated incident across the country, that many companies are doing similar things, is it not time that we had legislation to require major corporations to justify their actions which disrupt the lives of many families and many communities?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I do not happen to be informed on this particular

case, but I do know that there is a very general policy, one that is widely respected, of asking the private sector, when it is proposing to close down plants, to consult both levels of Government and that steps be taken in order to try to find solutions to the problems of the people who will be unemployed as a result. The Hon. Member is proposing a legal change which, at first blush, would seem to me to be within the clear jurisdiction of the Provinces. Obviously Consolidated Bathurst is a company operating within a Province, under provincial laws, and it is provincial labour laws which apply there. It is provincial laws which apply to the general operation of that company. Therefore it might be more useful if the suggestion were made to the provincial Premiers in various Provinces to consider that type of reform.

REQUEST FOR LEGISLATION AUTHORIZING INQUIRIES INTO PLANT CLOSURES

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the advice. Given that I cannot do that, and given that the Consolidated Bathurst head office is in Montreal and they intend to put an additional shift on there which will replace the work done by the workers in Hamilton, and given that this happens in one Province after another across the country, is it not reasonable to think that we might require some federal legislation which would cover all the Provinces and would enable the federal Government to inquire into the reasons behind the closures taking place, to determine whether or not there are in fact justifiable economic reasons or whether it is simply another rationalization to improve profits at the expense of the workers and their families?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, once again I cannot deal with the substance of the suggestion since I have not looked into the presumably valid financial reasons why Consolidated Bathurst is doing this. But I reiterate to the Hon. Member the point that it is not because a problem exists in many Provinces that it suddenly becomes a matter under federal jurisdiction. Education, for instance, is a matter dealt with by all Provinces but it does not, because of that, become a matter under which—

Mr. Deans: They do not close a school in Ontario from a Quebec base.

Mr. Trudeau:—under which we can pass laws. So I ask the Hon. Member to reflect on the Constitution of this country and see if I am not right in suggesting that that problem is one for the Provinces. The Hon. Member says he cannot talk to the Provinces. He probably can talk to the Premier of Manitoba; would he pass such a law, Madam Speaker?

Mr. Deans: What the hell good is that? It is happening in Quebec and Ontario.