

Oral Questions

company to three people who did not use any of their own money. They used the money from a mortgage on valuable properties which the government gave them. One of the three could not even get a credit card.

The hon. member is trying to tell us that no one in Canada could come up with a better deal than giving away that company to those three people. The government's treatment of the workers of Route Canada is intolerable.

When is the government going to compensate these workers and their families for the financial hardship which the government caused as a result of its negligence and callous disregard?

Hon. Doug Lewis (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, neither repetition nor shouting at the top of one's lungs gives any strength to allegations that do not have any foundation. My hon. friend knows that.

I will read from the letter again: "In the process, we negotiated special arrangements to help ease the impact on employees not required to operate the new company profitably. We have met every one of our commitments to employees, pensioners, customers and communities, including the payment of \$23 million for separation and related costs of former CN Route employees".

I submit that no matter how many times my hon. friend repeats the allegations and no matter how loud he does it, he knows that CN did the best it could for the employees and for the people of Canada.

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TRADE

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday afternoon of this past week the Minister for International Trade said that no decision had been taken on further involvement in the U.S.—Mexico free trade talks. However, by Tuesday evening we discovered that the minister met with Mexico's trade minister.

The President of Mexico says that this was because he was seeking a free trade deal with Canada too. I have to ask the government why it was pretending that it had not decided on closer involvement with these talks when the Prime Minister discussed them with President Salinas

earlier this year, when President Bush phoned the Prime Minister this week, and now when the trade minister of Mexico came to this country.

Why do we have this incredible game of hide-and-go-seek that is trying to cover this up for the Canadian people?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely certain it is not the intention of the hon. member, but there is no doubt that statements like his mislead the people of Canada. I know that that is not his intention, but there is no doubt at all that statements like this would mislead people to think that Canada is discussing with the United States or with Mexico the entry by Canada into a free trade agreement with those two countries. We are not.

The statements that were made by the Minister for International Trade, by myself, and by the Prime Minister, have been consistent on this question. I repeat them again to the hon. member and I call upon him to exercise his judgement as a member of Parliament not to try to create false fears in the country.

There has been a decision taken by the presidents of two other countries, Mexico and the United States, to determine whether it is in their interest to proceed with negotiation of a trade agreement. If they decide to do that, there may well be some implication on the interests of Canada. We, naturally, are keeping in touch with the Mexicans, we are keeping in touch with the Americans to see what it is they are discussing, whether it might have some implication for Canada, and if it does, we will then take decisions as to what Canada should do.

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, I simply note the facts as they have come out. If the facts suggest that the government is wrong, that is not my fault; that is the government's fault.

On Tuesday, yet another manufacturer, Fruehauf, said it was shutting its Brantford plant, cutting 334 jobs. As the company said, "Very simply, the playing field is not level".

Does the government not realize that Mexico's low wages, poor social benefits, slack environmental laws would tilt that playing field even more firmly against