

[Translation]

INDUSTRY

SOGEFOR LIMITED—DISCUSSION BETWEEN QUEBEC AND OTTAWA RESPECTING CLOSING OF PLANTS

Mr. Réal Caouette (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, in view of the absence of the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion, I shall put my question to the Prime Minister.

Everyone has heard of the coming closing of the Sogefor plants at Maniwaki and Mont-Laurier. Is the government now studying the matter and is it, in any way, in touch with the Quebec authorities with a view to preventing the closing down of those two plants?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I believe that, in the final analysis, those plants came under the General Investment Corporation and, to my mind, it is up to the Quebec government to make decisions in this regard. If they wish to consult the federal government, we are always available.

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[English]

TRADE

ACTION TO INCREASE EXPORTS OF MANUFACTURED GOODS

Mr. H. W. Danforth (Kent-Essex): Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct a question to the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. In view of the direct relationship between the export of manufactured goods and the desperate need of employment opportunities in Canada, can the minister indicate if any crash programs or new incentives for Canadian sales were inaugurated on the occasion of the visit of our government representatives to the Singapore Conference and the surrounding countries which do have expanding markets, and can we expect a sharp increase in sales to this most lucrative area?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): I could easily say, Mr. Speaker, that most of our programs are based on that line of thinking. For example, when we assist exporters through the Export Development Corporation this is what we have in mind. When we negotiate agreements on science and technology applied to industrial development, this is also what we have in mind. Mr. Speaker, I tried to say a moment ago, and you realize you should have allowed me to make the answer, that the postulate of the question was wrong. The manufactured goods content of our exports has been growing tremendously in recent years. Let me give the figures.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Hees: Down, down—watch your manners, Jean-Luc.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. It seems to me that the minister is embarking on a statement of a general nature.

Inquiries of the Ministry

I should think that the minister might wish to make a reply which would be brief, succinct and to the point, but I believe he was doing a little more than that. He may have an opportunity to continue the matter if supplementary questions were put later in the question period.

Mr. Danforth: Mr. Speaker, may I ask a supplementary question and make it simple so the minister can answer very briefly. In view of the fact that present sales are not good enough, was anything new initiated at that conference or in that area?

Mr. Hees: Yes or no.

Mr. Pepin: Mr. Speaker, I have answered that. Almost everything we do has that particular purpose. For example, to mention something we are doing now, we are developing an export market strategy which is developing all kinds of things.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Hees: Why not develop some export sales and leave strategy alone?

Mr. Pepin: Mr. Speaker, this is an unfair question, and I suggest that when questions are based on a false assumption they should not be allowed.

SUGGESTED REPEGGING OF CANADIAN DOLLAR TO ASSIST EXPORTERS

Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Hastings): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct this question to the Prime Minister. In view of the great difficulties being experienced by exporters today caused by the wide fluctuation of the Canadian dollar, is the government giving consideration to repegging the dollar in the vicinity of, say, 97 cents United States in order to make it easier for our exporters to contract for future orders? They are finding it very difficult to do this today which means that it will be difficult for them to provide employment if they are not able to do so.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Obviously there are always difficulties in trading in the international market, Mr. Speaker, but the hon. member does not seem to realize that we had the best trading year by far in our peacetime history last year.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: The hon. member is asking if we will consider pegging the dollar. Obviously he knows that this is the type of question on which we cannot announce our intention; it is something we either act on or do not act on. We do not broadcast our intention in advance in order that speculators may make a fast buck at the expense of the hon. member and other citizens of this country.

Mr. Hees: Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister obviously believes this is an unimportant matter I should like to ask him if he would be willing to meet in the very near future with a delegation from the Canadian Exporters Association to learn at first hand of these tremendous