

Oral Questions

long years of service and experience and now face horrendous difficulties in convincing new firms to invest in their talents.

Their dilemmas are not easy ones. Older workers still have mortgages to pay and families to maintain. The morale and self esteem of young graduates are being shattered every day.

The Government has failed to address these two solitudes in our society. Through innovative employment programs we simply must combat this two-pronged employment malaise so that young Canadians are not denied a place to stand and older workers are not forgotten or abandoned.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[*Translation*]

FREE TRADE**CLOSURE OF SIMONDS PLANT IN GRANBY—REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE**

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Right Hon. Prime Minister. Last Friday employees at Simonds Saw in Granby read on the bulletin board next to the "punch" that their employment with the company would end on November 11 this year, because of the company's decision to transfer its operations back to Massachusetts and cover the North American market from its plant in the United States, thus adding 131 Canadians to the ranks of the unemployed.

I sent a telex to the Prime Minister the same day, and I therefore want to ask the Prime Minister: Has he had a chance to look at the possibility of adjustment programs for these workers, a pre-retirement program or even a program to reopen the business with Canadian backing?

[*English*]

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, we have dealt with this matter on two occasions this week. I believe the hon. gentleman is referring to the plant in Granby which he falsely stated was to be closed because of the U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement. Of course, he has now had to drop those allegations.

All government programs in connection with situations where plants close, for retraining or assistance for workers who are laid off, are in effect under the Department of Employment and Immigration and others. Everything will be done to assist them, as is always the case whenever a plant closes in Canada for whatever reason.

In this case two of the company's four plants are being closed, one in the United States and one in Canada, for reasons, the company says, of economy and greater productivity.

[*Translation*]

LOSS OF NUMERONS JOBS IN GRANBY—REQUEST THAT GOVERNMENT ACCEPT ITS RESPONSIBILITY

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, I would really like to have the Prime Minister's attention in this matter which is vitally important, since the 131 victims of free trade down in Granby are in their fifties. There is no pre-retirement program for these people. As for the programs referred to by the Minister for International Trade, the only programs available are unemployment insurance for 52 weeks and welfare up to 65. I hope the Minister doesn't think these programs are designed to deal with the problems of these people.

Mr. Speaker, the workers at Simonds Saw are not looking for handouts. They didn't ask to have their jobs taken away and transferred to the United States. The workers at Simonds Saw want some consideration from the Government.

Mr. Speaker, I am not the only one who thinks this is a consequence of free trade. Even a supporter of free trade, the PQ MNA for Shefford, wrote to Premier Bourassa saying that manufacturing of knives and saws will be transferred to Fitchburg, Massachusetts, in accordance with the principles of free trade.

Consequently, I want to ask the Government to act responsibly and ask the Prime Minister what he has to say to 131 people who just lost their jobs and who will be out on the street as of November 11.

● (1420)

[*English*]

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, I am sure I can speak on behalf of the Prime Minister and the Government to these 131 persons to say that we very much regret the fact that they will be unemployed as a result of the decision of this company to close its plant, which has no connection at all to the U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement. This was confirmed by Simonds official J. D. Patry who said there was no connection between the plant closing and the trade deal. He is a native of Granby. He has been laid off himself as the plant comptroller. He said he had no stake in protecting the company, but the position is that there was no connection between the plant closing and the trade deal.

I commiserate with these employees at that plant too because their representative appears to be interested in nothing but attempting to score political points out of their misfortune.

[*Translation*]

REQUEST THAT GOVERNMENT INTEREST ITSELF IN SITUATION OF WORKERS

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, once again I ask the Prime Minister to show some sympathy and understanding for what happens to ordinary workers.