

Oral Questions

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

ATTITUDE OF DEPUTY MINISTER TOWARD NEW BRUNSWICK

Mr. Fernand Robichaud (Westmorland—Kent): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Mr. Speaker, I must say that I was in a state of shock when the April 10 memo, signed by Mr. Lussier and Mr. Edwards, was released. The unemployment rate in New Brunswick is now 15 per cent, and in the Acadian peninsula, according to the memo, it is 23.8 per cent. My question is as follows: Could the Minister explain why her department is prepared to use blackmail, and do so at the expense of the unemployed in New Brunswick, to force the Premier of New Brunswick to sign an agreement? Mr. Speaker, I think this is absolutely appalling.

● (1430)

[English]

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I would like to get some facts on the table in this matter. First of all I want to tell you, Sir, and Members of the House, that I did not see the memo in question until last night. At no time have I had a telephone call from Premier Hatfield on this matter.

Second, even though the Leader of the Opposition does not want to hear an explanation I feel that it is proper to give it. I want to tell the House that the planning phase for the Community Futures Program in the Acadian peninsula was signed and was approved in February of this year, well before the memo in question.

Third, negotiations for a National Training Act agreement had been going on since the latter part of last year, and I understand they are near conclusion. At no time was there ever any mention—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Minister is embarking on a statement.

[Translation]

INQUIRY WHEN MINISTER WILL AUTHORIZE DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS

Mr. Fernand Robichaud (Westmorland—Kent): Mr. Speaker, will the Minister immediately provide funds for employment development throughout the province, since those funds belong to the people of New Brunswick, and should never at any time be used for political purposes? When will she be releasing those funds?

[English]

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, the memo of April 10 was a suggestion of accelerating the processes in these two negotiations. I want to say I will do that every time I can where unemployment is 24 per cent, or, indeed, with regard to

Community Futures Program the planning stage of which has been approved elsewhere in the country.

I can assure you that what we approved and what we are negotiating at no time involved a proposal for the additional expenditure of moneys other than those which would be contemplated under the Community Futures Program and the regular programs of the Canadian Jobs Strategy. We will see that they are put into effect in the Acadian peninsula because we do understand that with a rate of 24 per cent unemployment there is action that is needed.

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TRADE

CANADIAN LUMBER EXPORTS—UNITED STATES PRESIDENT'S LETTER TO U.S. SENATOR

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister. On May 8 the President of the United States sent a letter to Senator Packwood indicating a plan to take unilateral action against the Canadian softwood industry if necessary. Would he explain what our Prime Minister did in response to that letter and that indication of intent by the President of the United States?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member has distorted the letter that was written by the President to Senator Packwood. He should know that, before he gets an answer to that question.

PROPOSAL THAT PRIME MINISTER INTERVENE

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, I think the record will speak for itself that the letter the President wrote essentially said, if necessary, he would take unilateral action.

Yesterday in reply to me the Secretary of State for External Affairs said that the Government is going to do everything open to it to represent the Canadian forest industry at this critical moment. We have made a proposal today for the Prime Minister of Canada to intervene. Is that not an option open to the Government?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. This is a long preamble.

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member has distorted the President's letter again in his preamble. I am not going to respond to a question where that Hon. Member, if I might use that phrase very loosely, is going to use distortions of that order.

Mr. Speaker: Order, order. The Chair does not like to intervene during Question Period, but the Hon. Minister is, in effect, imputing motives to the Hon. Member. I must ask him to withdraw the implication that the Member is deliberately distorting something. That is what the Chair heard. I ask you to withdraw that implication.