

Oral Questions

Mr. Fontana: Thanks for the auto pact.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is for the Minister of Employment and Immigration.

We in Scarborough are losing 3,000 skilled jobs and a valuable facility which has earned General Motors a net profit of about \$2 billion over the last 10 years. This highly skilled work force is now being disbanded and liquidated and decent hard working families are now being devastated by this plant closure.

I ask the minister of employment: Why did the government permit this tragic economic loss to occur?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member fails to mention that in December 1991 GM announced its plans to retire 74,000 employees in all of its operations.

How did we cope with the situation at Scarborough? It was by working as a department along with the province of Ontario, GM and the Canadian automobile workers to establish an industrial adjustment committee which is in place. It is there to help those workers and the work is ongoing.

Mr. Fontana: They want a job, not a handout.

Mr. Valcourt: These people affected can benefit from all programs that are in place at the federal level, at the provincial level and work with the union in order to help these workers retrain and have access to other jobs.

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YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Bob Speller (Haldimand—Norfolk): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister should be aware that since 1985 the Challenge Program for youth has had its budget slashed by more than one-half, from \$205 million in 1985 to \$101 million for 1993. The youth minister talks about a \$5.1 million increase this year for SEED, summer employment initiative, yet what he does not say is that in rural Canada SEED budgets have been slashed dramatically.

Why is the minister discriminating against unemployed youth in rural Canada? Why is he cutting the budgets for rural youth?

• (1450)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, again this is totally ignoring the facts. The facts are that the workings of the SEED program were changed this season. They were changed in two ways.

First, in Ontario the budget for SEED was increased by \$2.2 million to \$28.5 million. That is one change. It was continued in the budget. The other change is this summer there will be more emphasis placed on urban centres because of the employment situation in cities across Canada.

When you look at the level of unemployment in the cities for youth along with the rural areas, you come to the conclusion that rural areas were getting an unfair share of the funds. To re-establish balance and equity we have increased the amount for urban centres.

Mr. Bob Speller (Haldimand—Norfolk): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Haldimand—Norfolk the unemployment rate is 21 per cent. The unemployment rate is well above the national average. The minister should check his statistics.

The Prime Minister should be aware that one-third of street kids in urban centres come from rural Canada. Therefore, cutting funds to SEED in rural areas only encourages youth to leave their communities for cities. This only compounds these problems in the cities.

Will the Prime Minister make a commitment today in this House to restore this funding to rural Canada and to give the rural youth the much needed hope that they deserve?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, in these times of fiscal restraint when the government is cutting expenditures the hon. member is not telling his colleagues in the House and all Canadians that this program, instead of being cut, has been increased.

Mr. Speller: Take it or leave it for rural Canada.

Mr. Valcourt: Under the job creation program for students more Canadian students will be working this summer than last summer. Moreover, with the economy rebounding the private sector will create more jobs for students, thanks to the policies of the Minister of Finance.