

Oral Questions

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, the Minister should read the statements of his colleague, the Minister of Finance, who said yesterday that the Government is following a high interest policy to cut job creation and job growth in Canada over the next year.

[*Translation*]

REQUEST FOR FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister. Last summer, the provincial premiers called for consultative mechanisms between the two levels of government, to deal with the many lay-offs and other effects of free trade. Will the Government be responding to its provincial counterparts and calling a federal-provincial conference as soon as possible, to help workers?

[*English*]

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, the Government is following an anti-inflationary policy which has been most successful in inducing economic growth with the result that 1,303,000 jobs were created in the last four years. The youth unemployment rate was brought down, and 738,000 more women are working today than were working four years ago. We intend to continue with that kind of successful economic policy under the direction of the Minister of Finance and of the Prime Minister.

With respect to unemployment, the question is not whether someone is unemployed as a result of the U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement which is not even yet in effect; the question is how to assist persons who become unemployed from no matter what the cause, and we have in effect now a broad range of programs and we are prepared to improve those programs wherever it is seen that improvements are needed. We do not need any joint consultation with the provinces to continue with that. In the meantime, the premiers will be meeting with the Prime Minister in due course to discuss the economy, as they have every year.

CLOTHING INDUSTRY EMPLOYEES

Mr. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister for International Trade. Thanks to the Free Trade Agreement, the needle trade, the clothing trade, is already looking at massive closings, and with them the laying off of hundreds of workers both in my riding and across Canada. The Free Trade Agreement does not consider the particular interests and needs of the needle industry, given its materials, energy and labour costs, and the intensive, competitive nature of the business. The pinch

of the Free Trade Agreement is already being felt by Canadian-operated businesses.

Some Hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Volpe: This may not be of interest to the Party across—

Mr. Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the Hon. Member, but I think the Hon. Member has set the basis for his question. I would ask the Hon. Member to put his question.

Mr. Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I want to know if the Minister for International Trade has specific strategies to assist the enterprises in the clothing industry and the workers who are dependent upon that industry for employment, workers who are about to lose their jobs thanks to the FTA.

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, I do not think either the country or the hon. gentleman's constituents gain anything from this kind of wild scare talk about the needle trade. There has been a SAGIT, an advisory group for that industry, which advised us during the course of the U.S.-Canada free trade negotiations. The SAGIT advises us during the course of GATT negotiations. That will be continuing.

The apparel industry and the industry generally have been assisted by the programs that were announced by the Minister of Finance at the end of last March. There may be some adjustment over the next few years in that industry and if there are adjustments that require government assistance, then the government assistance will be forthcoming.

Mr. Volpe: It will be interesting to see how the priorities of the Government shake down as the pressures for assistance come from both the industry and—

Some Hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Speaker: I know the Hon. Member who has a matter of some concern, and it is a serious matter, would want to use his preamble to set the basis for the question, and I ask the Hon. Member to put his question.

SITUATION OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN WORKERS

Mr. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Since the workers in the needle trade are primarily middle-aged immigrant women, among the most vulnerable in the labour force given their lack of education and language skills, what specifically is the Minister's Department proposing to do by way of assisting these women with limited employment opportunities outside the industry but who wish to continue to be gainfully employed?