

Oral Questions

strongly advocating support for the Canadian Wheat Board and its traditional strength as a marketing agency on behalf of Canadian farmers. Others are taking a different point of view and supporting the argument that is contained in the question that has just been asked.

As I say, I am receiving a large number of these representations. Some of them propose the notion of a plebiscite as a method of resolving this controversy on the prairies with respect to grain marketing systems.

To those who have proposed the notion of a plebiscite I have responded with a number of technical questions that I think they ought to address and think carefully about before rushing to embrace that particular form of solution.

At this moment in time, to my knowledge, I have not received any replies to those questions but I anticipate I will. That will be a part of the input that the government will take into account as we consider this question.

Mr. Leon E. Benoit (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the minister.

Canadian grain farmers have been demanding for years that the wheat board be democratized and that the board monopoly be brought to an end.

In a recent poll only 29 per cent of grain farmers want the wheat board to remain the sole marketer of barley to the United States.

When will the government stop resisting farmers' requests for more choices in marketing their barley and hold a plebiscite on this issue?

Hon. Ralph E. Goodale (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Mr. Speaker, in response to the first question, I indicated there were a number of serious issues that those who advocate the notion of a plebiscite might want to consider very carefully, one being the legal basis on which a plebiscite might be held.

Those who recall the previous government might remember that government was ensnared in some rather serious legal difficulties because it acted without the proper legal authority, according to the Federal Court of Canada.

There are a whole range of other questions having to do with the structure, the voting list, the wording of the question and the kind of majority required to carry the question. There are eight or nine technical and logistical questions that need to be answered very seriously before one would rush to embrace this particular proposal.

I have put those questions very seriously and sincerely to those who advocate the notion of a plebiscite. I await, with a great deal of interest, their response to those questions.

[Translation]

WORKER ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMS

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. Yesterday the Minister of Human Resources Development stated that the federal government had no plans to introduce specific adjustment programs to help workers who lose their jobs because of recent international trade agreements. Once again, the Liberal government is doing an about-face on a major economic issue. Before the election, the Liberal Party stressed in particular the need for free trade adjustment measures.

My question is as follows: Can the Prime Minister confirm that his government does not intend to introduce specific adjustment programs for workers displaced by NAFTA, considering that this was a sine qua non condition for his supporting NAFTA?

• (1450)

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, in response to the hon. member I would like to point out that in addition to the NAFTA agreement we have also just signed a major agreement on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. A number of other major changes are taking place internationally.

When I answered the question I said we are not providing specific adjustment for one event; we are providing adjustment for all workers affected by major changes internationally and we will continue to do that.

I would simply say to the hon. member she could be far more helpful if she participated in the development of those adjustment programs rather than opposing them as she has for the last several months.

[Translation]

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier): Mr. Speaker, if the minister believes that the recent reform of the unemployment insurance program is the way to help workers affected by NAFTA and GATT, I would like to suggest some very enlightening reading material to him.

The red book will soon be a source of embarrassment for the Liberals. It states the following and I quote: "Governments must assist individuals and firms to deal with the restructuring that is occurring as a result of trade liberalization. Such assistance is critical to building acceptance of structural reforms in the Canadian economy".

After criticizing the Conservative government so harshly, the Liberals are taking exactly the same attitude. Why are you reneging on your party's commitments?