

Oral Questions

MEASURES TO AID AFFECTED WORKERS

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. We just heard three Ministers indicate that the Government is not prepared to bring in any innovative measures to aid workers displaced by the trade deal. The Prime Minister said on November 25, in complete contradiction to what we just heard, that the Government would be innovative and generous with adjustment and retraining program wherever and whenever they were needed.

Since we have had some 2,400 lay-offs—

Mr. Crosbie: Nonsense.

Mr. Broadbent: —that have been announced to be either directly or indirectly related to the trade deal since the election day—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Broadbent: —why is the Government not bringing forward those measures that the Prime Minister promised to aid workers who are affected now, not next spring?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the New Democratic Party prefaced his question by saying, I think I have it accurately, that three Ministers indicated that the Government was not prepared to bring in new training programs. That is not accurate.

Mr. Broadbent: Now.

Mr. Mulroney: Now the Leader of the NDP says “now”. The free trade agreement is not yet in effect. We already have various—

Ms. Copps: What about Gillette workers?

Mr. Marchi: Just wait until it is in effect.

Mr. Speaker: I think Hon. Members would agree that, with many more Members seeking the floor during Question Period, I have to try to be as fair and firm as I can. I would ask Hon. Members to keep their comments to a minimum so that their own colleagues will be able to have a chance to ask questions. The Right Hon. Prime Minister.

Mr. Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, I was trying to indicate to the Leader of the NDP, in regard to a legitimate question that he raises about retraining and innovative and generous retraining programs, that at the moment we have some of the best in the world but clearly we can

do better. We have invited Jean de Grandpre, one of Canada's most distinguished people, to chair a blue ribbon commission to examine the programs that exist around the world, to ensure that as the Free Trade Agreement comes into effect over a period of time, as the need emerges, if it does, we have in place the finest programs that exist anywhere. That was the commitment we made and that is the commitment we are going to honour.

Mr. Broadbent: I say to the Prime Minister that unemployed workers who have already had their lay-off announcements cannot eat blue ribbons. They want action now.

● (1430)

REQUEST THAT GOVERNMENT INTRODUCE NEW PROGRAMS

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Since the distinguished gentleman to whom the Prime Minister has alluded has said he will not have his report ready until quite possibly as late as June, I return to what the Prime Minister promised on November 25 when he said that whenever and wherever those programs would be needed, the Government would produce them. They are needed in Canada and they are needed now. Why do we not get such legislation before we recess for the Christmas break and not after?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the NDP says that the programs are needed now and he ties that statement to a quote of mine on November 25. That quote on November 25 was in regard to the Free Trade Agreement which will come into effect beginning on January 1. There is no correlation whatsoever between what the hon. gentleman says now and that, which is not to diminish the need for better retraining programs on behalf of employees in Canada.

My hon. friend refers to some of the job changes that have occurred. Some four million Canadians a year change jobs for various reasons. We have a very dynamic and mobile workforce. Retraining will always be a great challenge for the federal and the provincial Governments.

What my hon. friend should, I think, remember, is that the record of 1.3 million new jobs that have been created over the last four years, leading the industrialized world, can and will be maintained with the dynamic and modern approaches that we have adopted with the Free Trade Agreement.