

Oral Questions

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, I am glad that in this negotiation we have the support of the Liberal opposition in the House, as was shown by the statements made by the members for Broadview—Greenwood and LaSalle—Émard.

I can say this: There is no deadline but we would like to settle these preliminaries by January or February, if we can. But there has been no deadline set and of course these are only preliminary discussions to ensure that we can agree on an agenda and the modalities for such negotiation, if it occurs.

Hon. Roy MacLaren (Etobicoke North): Mr. Speaker, given the current levels of wages, working conditions, and environmental abuse in Mexico, will the minister identify which labour-intensive industries in Canada will be hit the hardest by Mexican competitors? Has the government yet undertaken any sector-by-sector studies of what adjustment assistance will become necessary to help Canadian workers and Canadian industries?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, I am appearing before the House of Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade this afternoon and I invite all members and spectators who might want to come to attend.

We are not concerned about wage levels alone because, of course, wage levels alone are simply one item in the factors that affect competitiveness.

• (1450)

The greatest competition for this country lies with the United States, the European Community, and Japan—the highly industrialized, high wage countries which have the research, development, and technology to compete with us—not low wage countries.

We are not going to follow the advice of the NDP and cut off all trade with the developing world so that the developing world will never become developed.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Agriculture. In his absence, I will ask the associate minister to respond.

The minister knows that world wheat prices are the lowest in 60 years, so low that in fact the Canadian Wheat Board can hardly make sales on the international market.

How can farmers pay their bills this year when the Wheat Board is not able to make many sales on the international market and the prices are the lowest since 1930? What is the government going to do to help these producers?

Hon. Pierre Blais (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs) and Minister of State (Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I would say, first, that the \$500 million we put on the table this last spring was the response of the federal government to the needs of the farmers in Canada.

We asked the provinces to share the burden with us, because we think agriculture is a shared responsibility in Canada.

The other reason is that at the international level we worked, since the Prime Minister's speech in Tokyo, to put agriculture on the agenda of the world's trading nations. Since that time, we have brought agriculture as the first priority so that all countries reduce their subsidies in this field.

In these last few weeks before December, what we have done and what we are going to do to help farmers in the west is to make all countries around the world realize that those subsidies are just destroying agriculture.

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, grain farmers are facing the worst cash flow crisis in their history this fall with practically no markets and very low prices.

How can a farmer even meet his direct out-of-pocket production costs of some \$65 per acre, when he can only deliver \$11 per acre? That results in a loss of some \$54 per acre. What is the government going to do?