

Oral Questions

He had promised that by today the de Grandpré Commission would be giving a report on how to deal with the numbers of lay-offs that will be caused by the trade agreement to be signed with the United States. We learned today from officials that there never was any intention to table a plan or provide recommendations, and the de Grandpré Commission will not be reporting until next June. In the meantime thousands of workers will be affected.

What specific plans does the Government have in the next six months to provide direct aid and assistance to the thousands of workers who will be affected by the trade agreement, who will lose their jobs and their livelihoods in their communities? Is the Government prepared to offer any plans, now that the phantom of the de Grandpré Commission has been dispelled?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, in the first place the hon. gentleman's question is inaccurate factually. There will not be thousands of jobs affected as a result of the U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement. There will be thousands of jobs created, tens of thousands of jobs created. Of course it will be just as easy to claim that they will all be due to the U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement.

As the Prime Minister said, this morning we had a meeting with the de Grandpré committee to review with them their progress. We had an interim report from them to us about their progress, what they find to be the situation, and what their plans are in connection with making a final report. That report will be made as soon as possible, certainly long before the month of June.

Their report to the Ministers who met with them was very positive. There are a lot of positive advantages to the Free Trade Agreement of which we should be ready to take advantage.

There was no suggestion by them that there was any emergency situation that had to be dealt with in any way, shape or form.

I can give you a list of companies that are expanding, including Swift Textiles, R and M Nickel—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Hon. Member for Winnipeg South Centre.

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I would only say to the Minister that, rather than listening to the de Grandpré Commission, perhaps he and the Government would be advised to listen to the

workers who have already lost their jobs as a result of the agreement.

REQUEST FOR TRI-PARTITE CONSULTATION ON
POSSIBLE JOB LOSSES

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, in introducing Bill C-2, the Minister indicated that he expected that there would be job losses and the Government would be prepared to bring in plans.

Now that the de Grandpré Commission has failed to come up with any specific plan of action, will the Minister and his colleagues be prepared to sit down with the industry and the unions, in industries like food processing, printing, clothing, and all other industries identified by the Economic Council and the Bank of Nova Scotia as sectors where jobs will be lost, to deal with a plan of action to cover the kinds of losses and dislocations they will be facing? Will the Government act now? To follow the old slogan: "Don't wait for spring, do it now".

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, that slogan uttered by the hon. gentleman certainly shows his originality of mind. With respect to the meeting that was held with the de Grandpré committee, there already is a plan in force. There are already many adjustment programs in the Department of Employment and Immigration, Department of Labour and other government Departments.

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We already have in Canada a very dynamic economy in which hundreds of thousands of people, and in fact millions, change jobs every year, and those who need to be assisted in that process are assisted. That will continue.

The de Grandpré committee will be recommending as soon as possible, and we urge it to do so as soon as possible, certainly long before June, whether or not it thinks there are any additions needed to those programs. There is no emergency situation.

The Hon. Member referred to the Economic Council of Canada. Its forecast was and is that over the 10-year period there would be 439,000 jobs created, 187,000 jobs lost, for a net gain of 251,000 jobs over 10 years. The U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement has not yet commenced, and the hon. gentleman does nothing but cry wolf.