

Oral Questions

Why will the minister not make a definitive commitment to reducing taxes?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because one of the happiest days of my life so far was the day I was told I was not Minister of Finance.

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[Translation]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

Mr. Bernard St-Laurent (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

On September 19, here on Parliament Hill, the minister promised Ogilvie Mills workers that, by December, he would table amendments to the Canada Labour Code, introducing anti-scab provisions. Yesterday, the minister reneged on his promise, giving as a pretext that his department was preparing another bill on pay equity.

How can the minister justify his about-face regarding the need to introduce anti-scab provisions in the Canada Labour Code? How can he justify his about-face, except by an obvious lack of political courage?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no, it just means that we are doing a very thorough job of consulting with business, labour unions and other parties that would be affected. We are trying to do a major rewrite of labour codes. I have assigned the assistant deputy minister for labour to undertake that process. He is busily engaged at the present time reviewing the various aspects and a fairly broad based set of proposals. As soon as that is ready we will present the appropriate legislation to the House of Commons.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard St-Laurent (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how can the minister justify his refusal to table a bill before Christmas by saying that there is not enough time, when all that is required is a few amendments to the Canada Labour Code?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that it is not as easy as that. Certainly our experience over the last several months is that when we table amendments the members opposite usually hold up that legislation for weeks and months on end.

I have asked our assistant deputy minister to make sure that we have a very carefully assessed, very carefully judged set of reforms and proposals to make to the labour code.

As the Minister of Industry put in his paper today, the reform of the workplace, reform and modernizing our whole labour relations is the key to economic growth and development. Therefore we want to make sure that we do it right.

The Speaker: I would encourage all of us to listen to both the questions and the answers. It takes time to both pose and answer but I would ask you to curtail both the questions and the answers.

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SMALL BUSINESS LOANS

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the government is reported to be increasing the total value of loans it guarantees under the Small Businesses Loans Act to \$12 billion, an increase of 300 per cent. The program now loses about \$100 million a year.

Would the Minister of Industry tell the House why taxpayers should underwrite Canadian banks by assuming liabilities that should properly fall to entrepreneurs and banks, not taxpayers?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are really two questions there. The first one is why should there be a Small Businesses Loans Act program in the first place. The answer to that is very simply that the primary reason for getting loan capital to many small businesses is to provide some government guarantee, thereby offsetting the fact that many small businesses lack the security they require in order to otherwise borrow from the banks.

● (1440)

In answer to the question about subsidies, I would like to assure the hon. member that we are proposing changes to the SBLA program and further review which will move that program to one which is fully cost recoverable because I agree with him that it should not be an indirect subsidy to the banks.

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the business community and banks cannot be blamed for taking advantage of government largess. If we are dumb enough to give it to them they are going to be smart enough to take it. We have to put a stop to it.

We do not have a revenue problem in our country. To paraphrase a colloquialism, which is not intended to anybody in this House certainly, it is government spending stupid that we have to get under control. It is those three or four words.

The business community has time and time again told the government to reduce the tax burden on business and individuals. What specific measure has the Minister of Industry taken that will reduce government spending which will in turn reduce