

governing a country, and when it sees a sector being damaged as severely as this one, it is up to that government to take its responsibility seriously and at least indicate that it is cognisant of the problem and to put forth some plans for the rules and regulations under which that sector of the economy will be handled. To date, the government has given no indication at all that it is doing that, other than holding a watching brief, whatever that means.

● (1420)

Senator Roblin: I would not encourage my honourable friend to think that I intend to make any further statement on that matter in the near future. After all, we are in a free enterprise economy and, in days gone by, the oil industry has proved itself well able to cope with the ups and the downs, if we just leave the industry alone. If we had left it alone on the ups, it might have been better able to deal with the downs than it is now, and I do not see any reason why we should expect that government intervention in the marketplace, under present circumstances, would be a sound policy for the nation.

Senator Olson: I take it, then, that I can advise the people concerned in Calgary and in other places, too, that the government does not intend to take any action, notwithstanding the seriousness of the situation and, indeed, that there is the prospect that the government will take no action even though the situation is going to get much worse.

Senator Roblin: My honourable friend can give any advice that he sees fit to give, but it certainly will not necessarily reflect the policy of the government. I can tell my honourable friend that up to the present time, although this may change, both the industry and the Alberta government have indicated that they are not pressing, at this moment, for government intervention in the oil economy. They have been bitten once and they are twice shy.

Senator Olson: It is my job as a senator from that region to attempt to ascertain, so far as that is possible—and I see it is very difficult—what the government's attitude and position is to be and then to convey that to the people who have made inquiries. If the summary of the situation that I made a moment ago is inaccurate, perhaps the Leader of the Government in the Senate would tell me what is the response of the government to the situation.

Senator Roblin: My honourable friend need not worry himself about conveying the government's views to his constituents. He can convey his own views as much as he pleases, but the government is well able to say what it will do when it is able to make a statement.

Senator Olson: Except that it is not doing that.

Senator Roblin: My honourable friend, in his usual patient fashion, must be content until I am able to give him some further information.

LABOUR

PROSPECTIVE CANADA-UNITED STATES FREE TRADE AGREEMENT—POSSIBLE EFFECTS ON EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Philippe Deane Gigantès: Honourable senators, my question is addressed to the Leader of the Government in the Senate and it concerns a statement by the Honourable Minister of Labour, Mr. McKnight, as reported in the *Toronto Star* on February 14. In that publication, we are told that the minister stated:

Workers should brace themselves for inevitable layoffs and job changes caused by a free trade pact with the United States . . .

We are also told that the Minister of Labour said he had no idea how many workers could have their jobs changed or eliminated by the free trade drive.

I ask the Leader of the Government in the Senate whether studies have been made or are being made with the aid of modern techniques, such as input-output models, to take some measures in advance to alleviate the danger of unemployment for people who will be displaced by a free trade agreement with the United States.

Hon. Duff Roblin (Leader of the Government): My honourable friend, the Minister of Labour, said a good deal more than that which has been credited to him by my honourable friend in his comment. In fact, he also pointed out that we have seen a continuing change in the status of jobs, of job creation and the ability to hold jobs because the economy is in a rapidly changing and volatile situation. The fact that we have reduced our tariffs over the life of the present GATT to the extent that we have, with its effect on job availability, job training and transfers, indicates that the Canadian economy is pretty good at making those adjustments. Therefore it gives me some confidence to think that if the free trade measures come about, the Canadian economy will prove itself to be competent to deal with those adjustments as well.

However, the government does not intend to leave it at that. We have made it perfectly clear that we intend to make sure, to the extent that governments can, that there is retraining and proper transitional periods and other appropriate adjustments so that those people who are affected have a reasonable chance of finding their feet again. My honourable friend is, no doubt, aware that there is a committee of labour and management that is working now to develop policies to do that very thing.

Senator Gigantès: I have a supplementary question. "Training for which jobs" is the government document on training and employment which has been referred for study to the subcommittee I have the honour of chairing. Making predictions about jobs in the past has been a fairly difficult thing to do, but what the minister is saying here is that "workers should brace themselves for inevitable layoffs and job changes caused by a free trade pact." Does the minister know that there will be such layoffs and job changes? If so, what are they, and could we be let into the secret and could the public be let into the secret?