

Inquiries of the Ministry

discuss this subject I will be delighted to do so with any member of the Ontario or Quebec governments.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I suggest that perhaps we should go on to the next question and return to this one in a short while. For the moment the Chair will recognize the hon. member for Athabasca on a supplementary and then see what can be done about further supplementaries later.

DISCUSSION OF CANADIAN OIL AND GAS EXPORTS WITH VISITING UNITED STATES OFFICIALS—POSSIBLE PARTICIPATION BY ALBERTA IN FUTURE TALKS

Mr. Paul Yewchuk (Athabasca): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary. Can the minister indicate whether the agenda for the discussions with the United States officials will include the subject of oil and gas exports?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): No, Mr. Speaker. It has already been stated by the Prime Minister that discussion of energy matters with the United States would not take place at this time.

Mr. Yewchuk: If and when discussions on oil and gas exports are held, is it the intention of the government of Canada to invite participation by the government of Alberta in these discussions with the United States?

Mr. Pepin: If by "inviting" my hon. friend means to take part in the discussions, this is something different from having previous consultation with the government of Alberta. I suggest there is a difference between the two, and that the second is more possible than the first.

Mr. Speaker: Is the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands rising on a supplementary?

Mr. Douglas: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I might indicate to the House now that the Chair will recognize the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands on a supplementary and the hon. member for Gander-Twillingate and then go to the next subject and call on a representative of the party to the extreme left of the House.

PARTICIPATION BY FINANCE DEPARTMENT OFFICERS IN OTTAWA MEETING WITH UNITED STATES OFFICIALS—DISCUSSION OF EXCHANGE RATES

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a supplementary question to the Minister of Finance. Are officials of his department involved in the discussions which are taking place today with the representatives from Washington and, second, will the whole question of exchange rates be on the agenda?

Hon. E. J. Benson (Minister of Finance): Yes, Mr. Speaker. My officials are taking part in these discussions and as a matter of fact they were in Washington last week having discussions on this whole matter with the officials of the treasury.

Mr. Douglas: Press reports indicate that there have been statements by spokesmen of the Department of External Affairs to the effect that discussions have been

going on for some time and it is hoped that the ministerial meeting will be held early in the new year. Does this mean that certain areas of agreement have been reached and, if so, how soon will a statement be made by the government and is it necessary to wait until the new year before the ministerial meeting is held?

Mr. Benson: I think the two matters are mixed up. The ministerial meeting between certain ministers of the United States government and the Canadian government which takes place annually and discusses a great many matters is to take place early in the new year. I understand this is the statement of the Department of External Affairs. So far as the exchange problems and the balance of payments problems of the United States are concerned, the Group of Ten is planning a meeting in Rome, as my hon. friend knows, within a couple of weeks, on November 22 and 23, which I hope I as well as the secretary of the Treasury of the U.S. will be attending.

• (2:20 p.m.)

AUTHORITY FOR U.S. PRESIDENT TO INCREASE IMPORT SURTAX TO 15 PER CENT—CANADIAN REACTION

Mr. John Lundrigan (Gander-Twillingate): I have a question for the Minister of Finance. Has the Canadian government been informed officially or was it informed prior to now that today the United States Senate finance committee has voted to give President Nixon the authority to raise the U.S. import surcharge to 15 per cent on all products, not the restricted list of some months ago and, if so, what is the Canadian reaction to this position?

Hon. E. J. Benson (Minister of Finance): All I have on this matter is a telex. I think what the Senate committee is doing is simply to give President Nixon very broad powers. This is not an indication that he should do this or that. The same applies to the excise tax on automobiles. The Senate committee is simply giving the President, according to the telex I received, very wide powers to do whatever he deems necessary in particular circumstances.

Mr. Baldwin: How naïve can you be?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I will recognize the hon. member for Gander-Twillingate on a last supplementary question and then recognize the hon. member for Compton.

Mr. Lundrigan: Can the Minister of Finance tell the members of the House and the Canadian people whether, before he received the telex in question, there was any prior consultation with the American authorities, and what has been the initial response from his office?

Mr. Benson: First of all, I received the telex since I came into the House regarding the decision of the U.S. Senate committee. With respect to consultation, consultations on the particular problem of the surtax have been going on since it was first imposed. There have also been consultations with the United States government on a rather continuing basis with respect to their balance of payments problem.