

Oral Questions

beyond the levels we set for the government. We are prepared to negotiate. We have negotiated for the past months. We are prepared to negotiate at any time. I have said so in the House, and I say it again today: If the unions want to sit down at the bargaining table this afternoon, this evening, tonight or tomorrow, the government will be there to negotiate an agreement and to do so consistently and fairly, instead of having to consider binding conciliation.

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[English]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Jesse Flis (Parkdale—High Park): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Right Hon. Prime Minister and it pertains to his recent visit to the Soviet Union and to the NATO meeting.

On November 27, the Prime Minister stated this about Mr. Gorbachev in the House, and I quote from *Hansard*, page 6235:

But I was struck by his determination to succeed and by his confidence that success is possible—

I also believe, strongly, that it is in everyone's interests, including our own, that he succeed.

On November 5, in Brussels, he said, when referring to Mr. Gorbachev, "His economy is in such God-awful shape it would take the treasuries of everyone around the table to fix it and then some". Who is the Prime Minister fooling? The 240 business people that he took to the Soviet Union, encouraging them to invest in the Soviet Union economy, or the NATO leaders? Does he not realize that by undermining the leadership of President Gorbachev, he has just set back the termination of the Cold War for another 10 years?

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, it may be a surprise to the hon. member that the Soviet economy is in very difficult circumstances. That was not a surprise to the Canadian business people who were there looking for an opportunity to participate in the rejuvenation of that economy.

It is not a surprise to Mr. Gorbachev. During the conversations between the Prime Minister and Mr. Gorbachev in the Soviet Union, Mr. Gorbachev himself was brutally frank about the state of his economy and the extent of the challenge that he faces. Rather than trying to conceal the difficulty of that problem, we believe it is important to analyze directly, to be frank with the Soviets, to be frank with the world and to try to put together a series of actions that could help the Soviet Union achieve the kind of fundamental changes that the Soviets require.

Mr. Gorbachev knows that we think that they cannot achieve those changes without moving toward a price system, without becoming more competent in dealing with the market principles on which the world economy is based.

What the Prime Minister said in Brussels is what the Prime Minister said in Moscow. It is an accurate description of the state of the Soviet economy and an accurate beginning for the reform that is essential to that economy, and consequently to the progress of world peace.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Flis: Mr. Speaker, that is not what the Canadians are hearing. They are hearing the Prime Minister—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Flis: —say one thing at one meeting and the direct opposite at the other meeting.

Also on November 27, the Prime Minister told us in this House that with respect to grain trade, he responded on behalf of the Canadian agricultural producers "with great enthusiasm". With all due respect, Mr. Prime Minister, the Russian people cannot eat enthusiasm. They would rather have bread and butter on their tables.

When is the Prime Minister going to take the initiative and offer Mr. Gorbachev some tangible assistance to ensure that he can meet the population's expectations?

• (1450)

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): Mr. Speaker, I confess to having a certain advantage over the hon. member in terms of what the Prime Minister said in Moscow and what he said in Brussels because I was at both meetings. The hon. member was not. The Prime Minister said in Brussels what he said in Moscow. He said what the Soviets themselves understand and, indeed, are asking the rest of the world to understand, that they have a