

and for the miners who earn their livelihood in that occupation.

NATIONAL FINANCE

SELLING OF GOLD TO REDUCE DEFICIT

Hon. Sidney L. Buckwold: Honourable senators, I have a question for the Leader of the Government in the Senate, and I might add in advance that I do not know whether or not he will be able to answer it. One of the unusual features of federal government finance is that it operates on a cash basis and any disposal of assets is immediately considered as revenue for that given year. I must admit that I was rather astonished by a recent article in a well known newspaper in which the figures were given for the federal government's selling of gold during the last few years. The chart has the heading "Gold Windfall". It indicates that \$13.9 million worth of gold was sold in 1984 and \$12.1 million was sold in 1985. They do not relate it to sales; they say "profits", so I assume it is after the cost or whatever it was. The article says "profits". In 1986 the government found that it had a rather good thing going and \$196 million worth of gold was sold. In 1987 \$641 million was sold.

An Hon. Senator: Wow!

Senator Buckwold: In 1988 the profit was \$647 million, and in 1989 there was not quite as much sold; only \$444 million. In the last three years nearly \$2 billion of gold has been sold, the receipts from which have reduced our deficit by that amount.

My question to the minister is not one of criticism, because this is certainly within the orbit of the government, but I would like to know—and perhaps he could provide me with the information—on what basis is gold sold? Who makes the decision? Who determines what price should be paid? Is someone playing the gold market and waiting until it goes up or down or is it done under the pressure of the budget?

In addition to that, I would ask the Leader of the Government to report to this chamber the amount of other receipts during the last four years—1986 through to 1989—from the sale of assets which are not repeatable, such as the sale of Air Canada and other crown corporations; receipts which come into the current year's revenue of the government.

I am trying to find out, Senator Murray, how much of the government deficit was reduced in these years by the fact that there are one-shot revenue deals being used to reduce the deficit and minimize the problems that it creates. In addition, there is a wide variety of other ways in which the government could speed up the process of getting money: they could ask us to pay income tax faster; they could cut down on the remittance periods and could raise the interest rates. However, that can only be done once, and then next year we have to find another way of getting that revenue. I hope that information might be made available to us so that we can analyze the impact on the deficit of these revenue-producing activities, which most Canadians do not appreciate, especially the sale of gold, which I must admit comes as a surprise to me.

[Senator Murray.]

● (1520)

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, I appreciate the admiration that the honourable senator has expressed for the ingenuity of the people in the Department of Finance. I am not in a position to give him a report in the detail that he seeks, but I shall ask my colleague, Mr. Wilson, to do so at an early date.

[Translation]

THE CONSTITUTION

MEECH LAKE ACCORD—ATTITUDE OF PRIME MINISTER AND PREMIER OF QUEBEC

Hon. L. Norbert Thériault: Honourable senators, I have a question for the Leader of the Government in the Senate, supplementary to other questions on Meech Lake by my colleagues.

I must say that unlike most of my colleagues in the Senate, I am worried about this country, as a francophone outside Quebec, and I want to congratulate the Leader of the Senate on the conciliatory tone he has maintained throughout this debate, and even more so today.

I want to ask him whether this conciliatory tone reflects a new approach by the Prime Minister of Canada and Premier of Quebec, who have finally realized that threats are no way to establish a constitutional consensus in this country. Could he give me the assurance that the federal government and its negotiators will maintain this approach until June 23?

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government in the Senate and Minister of State (Federal-Provincial Relations)): Honourable senators, first of all, Senator Thériault referred to francophones outside Quebec. I may remind him that the *Fédération des francophones hors-Québec* is in favour of ratifying Meech Lake without any changes.

Second, I will simply add that our attitude has always been constructive. We are all looking for a way to resolve the deadlock. That being said, we cannot ignore what the consequences of failure would be.

Senator Thériault: Honourable senators, the Leader of the Government in the Senate must know I am aware of the position of francophones outside Québec and francophones in my own province. I do not totally disagree nor do I totally agree with their positions. It is my conviction that Canada has survived since Confederation for more than 120 years, thanks to a consensus that was reached every time after long, amicable discussions.

No one has a monopoly on the right or wrong solution, whatever the problem may be. I may remind the Leader of the Government in the Senate that according to the editorials his leader is so fond of quoting, many Canadians believe that so far, the rhetoric used by the Prime Minister of Canada and the Premier of Quebec and his principal spokesman, Mr. Rémi-lard, have done little or nothing to promote such a consensus.