

Inquiries of the Ministry

on history. We all know why Dick Whittington's cat went to see the queen, but why did Jack Pickersgill go to see the Queen?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

NATO—NOMINATION OF CANADIAN AS DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL

On the orders of the day:

Mr. Harold E. Winch (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, may I change the subject. I desire to ask a question of immediate urgency of the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister confirm or deny the report that the government has now nominated Mr. Roberts, deputy minister of trade and commerce, to the position of deputy secretary general of NATO? If so, what are the qualifications of this person to hold this important post?

May I further ask the Prime Minister whether this nomination is not a political manoeuvre to remove from government service the only remaining deputy minister appointed by the previous Conservative government?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I realize the general interest and importance of this question, but the urgency of it does not impress me very much. If the minister is prepared to give an answer to part one of the question he may do so, but part three is strictly out of order.

Mr. Winch: May I have your permission, because the matter is urgent, to say it is my understanding that on Monday of next week an announcement is going to be made by the Prime Minister. I now ask with regard to the second part whether Mr. Roberts has been nominated by the government for this important position in NATO, and what are the qualifications of this nominee.

Hon. Paul Martin (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, in view of the question and its implications for a distinguished public servant who has served Canada well under the former and under the present administration, I think I should point out that at the request of a number of countries Canada was asked to put forward the name of someone for the post of deputy secretary general. This suggestion, in the final analysis, could only be realized if the name put forward were accepted by the new secretary general of NATO.

Canada acceded to the request of a number of countries and put forward the name

of Mr. Roberts. There was no manoeuvre whatsoever involved. Mr. Roberts was prepared to accept this very important and heavy responsibility, if his name was acceptable to the new secretary general.

Until such time as the latter has taken public and official action, I would not propose to say more, except that I do not believe my hon. friend would want to leave the impression that Mr. Roberts might be assigned to this particular post as a result of any improper or undesirable action on the part of the government of Canada. If this post is accorded to Mr. Roberts, it will only be because he accepted it out of a sense of public duty and because his government considers that, great as his services have been to Canada, they may be needed more in this very important assignment which may be offered to him.

Mr. Winch: A supplementary question. We appreciate the answer of the Secretary of State for External Affairs but would he now, free from generalities and pleasantries, in view of an appointment of such importance, give to this house the qualifications of the man the government has recommended?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that my hon. friend has put this second question. I can say that there is no question about Mr. Roberts having every qualification for this important responsibility which may be extended to him.

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Burnaby-Coquitlam): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. May I ask the Secretary of State for External Affairs whether Mr. Roberts prior to this nomination indicated any desire to have his name placed before NATO?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): No, Mr. Speaker. It was only as the result of a suggestion which the Prime Minister and I made to him that in the national interest and in the interest of NATO, if this post should come to Canada, we thought he would be eminently qualified to fill it. I cannot say too strongly, in the light of discussions which are now under way that it is not fair to this eminent public servant to have it suggested that he is taking this post because he is not wanted in the public service of Canada. As a matter of fact, the Minister of Trade and Commerce and one of my other colleagues argued very strongly for his retention for reasons which could soon become obvious.