

Oral Questions

fact that it has been some weeks now since the CLC withdrew from the Canada Labour Relations Council and the Economic Council of Canada, can the minister tell the House who in the cabinet is charged with the responsibility of seeking ways and means to bring labour representation back to these two important organizations?

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, certainly it is part of my responsibilities and of those of some other ministers to try to deal with labour in as constructive a way as possible to make it easier for them, when they think the time is right, to re-enter these bodies where they have a real role to play in terms of their own success and in terms of the benefit to the labour movement in general.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, on May 4 the Minister of Labour said that labour's withdrawal from the Canada Labour Relations Council is, he hopes, only temporary. Labour withdrew in opposition to controls, and they will not end for another two and one half years. In view of this, has the minister any real grounds for advising that labour's withdrawal is only temporary or are we in fact looking to labour's refusal to participate until the control program is ended? What is the real truth of the matter?

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, it is very difficult to try to analyse what is going through the thought processes of each individual labour leader in the country with respect to what the hon. member has asked. All I can say is that I think it should be underlined that labour has withdrawn from these bodies; they have not resigned nor have they quit. It should be pointed out that their withdrawal paves the way for their participation later when they think the time might be appropriate. As to when is the appropriate time, I am afraid that is a question they will decide themselves, and certainly the CLC convention coming up next week will have a part to play in that.

MEETINGS WITH LABOUR OR PROPOSALS FOR RETURN TO PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT BODIES

Mr. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South): Can the minister tell the House whether he or other members of the cabinet have actually met with CLC, and especially whether the government has put any proposals to the CLC as a basis for their return to participation, or is there an absolute deadlock at the moment? Let us find out what the situation really is.

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Labour): I have talked to some of the leaders of the CLC. In terms of my other colleagues' responsibilities as they involve the labour movement, I believe they have been discussing those questions with the CLC. Certainly at the CLC's last presentation to the cabinet, as the hon. member may recall, they indicated they would welcome discussions on other subject matters having to do with policies which may evolve once the control period is over. They indicated a willingness to meet with the Prime Minister and others at that time. I believe discussions are going on now with respect to having meetings over a wide range of subject matters being undertaken fairly shortly.

[Mr. Fraser.]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

CANADIAN RESPONSE TO UNITED STATES PROPOSAL TO MINE NICKEL FROM SEABED—DISCUSSIONS WITH UNITED STATES

Mr. Lloyd R. Crouse (South Shore): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct my question to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, and at the same time I welcome him back to the House from his many travels. On Friday, April 30, I addressed a question to the Right Hon. Prime Minister about the Canadian attitude to United States proposals for mining the deep seabed, and the Prime Minister replied that he would inquire. Since then, the Law of the Sea Conference has issued a revised single negotiating text which includes a production control formula for nickel found on the international seabed. This formula will permit production of seabed nickel to increase by a minimum of 6 per cent per year. Since Canada is a major land-based producer of nickel, this formula is obviously of very great concern to us, and I should like to ask the Secretary of State for External Affairs what the Canadian response was to this particular proposal.

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, we opposed this particular proposal which was suggested for the text of the Law of the Sea convention. We made our concerns known to the United States delegation to the Law of the Sea Conference at New York. During my visit to Nairobi I had an opportunity to make representations directly to Dr. Kissinger with respect to this proposal and its possible effects on Canadian land-based production. We agreed that further consultations should take place between the two countries with respect to this proposal.

Mr. Crouse: In his speech to the Law of the Sea Conference on April 8 Dr. Kissinger said that if the deep seabeds are not subject to international agreement, the United States can and will proceed to explore and mine on its own, but he added that the U.S. would prefer partial international control through a council which should reflect the interests of producer and consuming states most concerned with deep sea mining. Canada is clearly one of these, and I therefore ask the Secretary of State for External Affairs whether Canada has been having bilateral discussions with the U.S. on the subject of the use of the international seabed, and if so, what has been the substance of these discussions?

Mr. MacEachen: This particular proposal emerged quite late in the day in New York, and to my recollection Canada was not involved in any discussions with respect to this formula until it surfaced within the text itself. At that point we registered our opposition to the particular formulation, and we will continue to register our opposition and hopefully make proposals which will serve Canada's interests better. I do not believe it is the intention of the United States to overcome its problems by creating problems for Canada.