

TRADE

Hon. Roy MacLaren (Etobicoke North): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister for International Trade.

The President of the United States has committed his government to negotiate a free trade agreement embracing the whole of the western hemisphere. The Canadian government has already decided to participate in the Mexico-U.S. free trade negotiations. Does the government now intend to explore, during the visit tomorrow of President Bush, the United States' intentions about free trade throughout the whole of the western hemisphere?

Last June, the minister stated that he needed more time to examine such a proposal. Will the minister now state what the government's intentions are regarding hemispheric free trade?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): The intentions of the government at the present time are to engage in a negotiation for a North American free trade agreement with the United States and with Mexico if the U.S. administration is authorized through the fast track process to proceed.

The President of the United States has indicated that the United States may possibly be interested in other free trade agreements with other countries of either South or Central America, but there is nothing like that on the negotiating table as yet.

The principle that guides us is that the freer trade can become between all nations of the world—this is the policy the Official Opposition as well, which supports the GATT negotiations—the better it will be for all of those involved, because it is the freer and freer trade that has caused the international prosperity since 1945.

Hon. Roy MacLaren (Etobicoke North): Mr. Speaker, the minister knows very well that discussions have already begun about hemispheric free trade, including free trade between the United States and Chile, and between the United States and countries of Central America.

He knows full well, too, that one of the reasons which he advanced for Canada participating in the talks with Mexico is that Canadian interests must be protected in a trilateral deal. Now, is he telling us that Canada will also participate in western hemisphere discussions?

Oral Questions

Will the minister tell us what it is that the Canadian government is doing to help equip Canadians to compete effectively internationally? What programs are there? Were there any programs in the recent budget to assist Canadians to compete more effectively in a global economy? When will the government commit itself to doing such things as reducing interprovincial trade barriers or investing in research and development and training and retraining so that Canadians can be more competitive?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, it is these policies of the government with respect to competition and encouraging Canadians to look outward and to be in a position to compete globally that the Official Opposition and the New Democratic Party have opposed so bitterly over the last several years.

The hon. gentleman is now indicating the conversion on the part of the Official Opposition that it is very welcome news, but no one in this House knows just what the policy is of the Official Opposition on anything.

I am glad to hear the minister apparently advocating freer trade.

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THE CONSTITUTION

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Today our party has tabled a motion before the House to open up the process on constitutional talks. I want to say to the Prime Minister that there is growing concern that, while publicly the Prime Minister and his government is saying that they want to listen to Canadians, privately there is only one voice being listened to, and that is of the corporate elite.

I understand that last week the Prime Minister's top constitutional adviser met with academics at Meech Lake to discuss a paper commissioned by the Business Council on National Issues. In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with that. It is clear that there are many initiatives going on that are not open to the Canadian public, at least even to know the mandate and the direction of this government.