

Oral Questions

AUTO PACT—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I would like to raise a supplementary question with the Prime Minister on the matter of the present negotiations being conducted with the United States on the trade package.

It is clear the Government is backtracking on a number of previous commitments it made to protect Canadian interests. Statements were made in the past that the Auto Pact would not even be talked about but we know it is on the table today being negotiated.

Has the Prime Minister given clear instructions to our chief negotiator that, as the Americans bring this pact forward for negotiation, we will not in any way allow the safeguard provisions of the Auto Pact to be negotiated away considering that it is the primary provision which guarantees jobs for Canadian workers in the auto industry?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the statement in regard to backtracking is quite misleading. There has been no change whatever in the position of the Government of Canada from the very beginning. The principles that the Minister for International Trade and I have laid out on behalf of the Government of Canada have been consistently followed by Ambassador Simon Reisman and his very excellent and worthy group of officials who are, at this very moment, conducting very delicate and complex negotiations on behalf of the people of Canada. I know my hon. friend would want to do nothing that would undermine their efforts.

AUTO PACT SAFEGUARDS

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, in defence of those interests and in defence against the undermining that appears to be taking place, did the chief negotiator have clear instructions from the Government of Canada? As we are now negotiating the Auto Pact, which the Prime Minister said we would not do, is it clear that the Government will not negotiate away the safeguard provision which is the guarantee in the Auto Pact that jobs will be protected in Canada? Why doesn't the Prime Minister simply say that those safeguards will be safeguarded?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the statement is inaccurate and misleading. We are not now negotiating the Auto Pact.

Mr. Axworthy: It is on the table today.

Mr. Mulroney: Now the Member says it is on the table. The Member just said "We are now negotiating the Auto Pact".

Mr. Axworthy: Yes, today. Right now.

Mr. Mulroney: I am—

Mr. Axworthy: Right now.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry put a question, and while I know other Hon. Members would like to put questions as well, perhaps there could be a proper turn for them to ask their questions. In the meantime perhaps the Right Hon. Prime Minister can be given a chance to answer.

Mr. Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, the statement of my hon. friend is inaccurate and completely misleading. This Government in the area of automotive products and the Auto Pact has defended consistently and, I think, well, the interests of Canada and the Province of Ontario in regard to the importance of that very critical trading instrument. It is indeed a model for other sectors of the growth economy.

Mr. Blackburn (Brant): It is not free trade.

Mr. Mulroney: We have indicated many times that the Americans are quite satisfied with the Auto Pact and very pleased with the way it has developed. If, however, they have some ideas that can contribute to jobs, greater wealth, greater prosperity for both sides, then, of course, we will listen. Surely my hon. friend would not want us to turn away an opportunity for greater jobs and prosperity. That matter has not yet been broached by the Americans at the table. If indeed it is, I will be happy to confirm it. But I can tell my hon. friend that the statement he made some moments ago is false and misleading, no doubt inadvertently.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: I want to advise the House that I am immensely relieved.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

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CONSTITUTION

MEECH LAKE ACCORD—WOMEN'S EQUALITY RIGHTS

Ms. Pauline Jewett (New Westminster—Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister and all the provincial Premiers have said that in drafting the Constitutional Accord they had no intention whatever of putting in question women's hard fought for, hard-won equality rights. Why then should there be any difficulty at all for First Ministers making explicit in the Accord what they say they intended?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, may I say respectfully to my hon. friend, who exemplifies the very best of the fight over the years for equality, that at all times that important concept has been protected and defended during the Meech Lake Accord discussions. My understanding is that the weight of the evidence fully supports that view.