

Oral Questions

● (1112)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

TRADE

REQUEST FOR REPORT ON GATT NEGOTIATIONS AT GENEVA

Mr. John C. Crosbie (St. John's West): Mr. Speaker, may I put a question to the Deputy Prime Minister who is leading a rump government here today? I guess the rest of the rump is over at the Confederation Centre.

We have not had a progress report on the GATT negotiations for months, and there is considerable alarm in Canada about the progress of GATT as the negotiations have to conclude by the middle of December. We have had newspaper reports that the Japanese and the EEC offers are unsatisfactory to Canada, that nothing has been offered in fisheries, farm products, forest products, non-ferrous metals and agricultural products.

Would the minister bring the House up to date on what is happening at Geneva? Are these reports accurate that the EEC and Japanese offers are unsatisfactory to Canada? If so, what is our strategy? We only have two months to go to the end of the negotiations. Would the minister agree to a full briefing of parliament and arrange time for a debate on these negotiations before they are concluded?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council): On the question of briefing of members of parliament, Mr. Speaker, I would be quite ready to have our chief delegate, Mr. Warren, meet with members of opposition parties to have an intensive briefing on the progress of negotiations.

On the question of the deadline, it is true that there is an enormous amount of work to be completed before the deadline suggested, which is some time in December. It is a negotiating session. For example, the European community at one point put on the table certain industrial tariff offers, and later there were certain withdrawals. Whether these are permanent withdrawals or a negotiating technique is uncertain at this time. In any event, we have not yet secured what we regard as advantageous offers from all the participants in the negotiations.

Of course, when it comes to the end of the game, Canada will have to decide whether the benefits we receive justify maintenance of the offers we have put on the table at the conference, so it is much too early to conclude what the results will be. I suggest there is quite a lot of work to do yet, and certainly we are not satisfied that our objectives have been fully met by the proposals that have been put on the table by the major industrial countries.

Mr. Crosbie: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question. It is always difficult to pin the Deputy Prime Minister down, so I should like to ask a more specific question. The government now has this report by the second tier committee. The government has a lot of "tears", I know, but this is the second tier

[Mr. Speaker.]

committee. The 23-industry task force report recommends as follows at page 13, paragraph 4:

There are certain manufacturing industries that are vital and where any degree of reduction in protection would be disastrous at this time.

They recommend that these industries be completely exempted from the Tokyo Round. They point to clothing and textiles, which they say is the key case, employing close to 200,000 workers. Could the Deputy Prime Minister tell me if the government has exempted the clothing and textile sector of Canadian industry from any lowering of tariffs in the GATT negotiations? Could he also tell me if any other industries have been exempted? Has Canada exempted any industries, in particular clothing and textiles, as recommended?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, there is provision for exemptions or exceptions from the over-all tariff cut that was proposed, but there is a limit to the number of exemptions that can be introduced because it requires compensation across the board in order to maintain the total tariff cuts.

Let me say, in the case of textiles, that at the present time there are not likely to be substantial cuts taking place at the multilateral trade negotiations. The concerns which the hon. member expressed are shared by quite a number of other countries. It is unlikely that the textile industry will experience the deep cuts that could occur in accordance with the general tariff formula.

Mr. Crosbie: Mr. Speaker, we are getting a tremendous amount of lack of information in these replies. I will try again in the fisheries sector.

● (1117)

Is it true that the European Economic Community has told Canada that they are not going to reduce their tariffs on Canadian fishery products unless Canada gives them assurance that they will have definite quotas for catching fish species within Canada's 200-mile economic zone? Is that a position taken by the European Economic Community?

Would the Deputy Prime Minister also tell me whether he is going to arrange, not only for a private briefing of members of parliament but for a public briefing of parliament so that the public and industry will know what our position is; and will he provide debating time before any conclusions are reached at Geneva? So there are two aspects to that question, on the specific question of the fishery and the EEC, because the fishing industry of Canada is very much involved in that, and as well the question of public information and debate, which is badly needed.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, there is, to my knowledge, no suggestion that we ought to link the access of Canadian products into the community with commitments that certain quotas would be provided for fish in Canadian territory. Certainly, we would oppose that particular kind of approach because it is understood, within the framework of the negotiations, that countries will make offers and concessions to other countries in return for access to their markets. The principle is