

Oral Questions

correct the present situation and simplify the present confusion is to abolish the GST and transfer this taxation field to the provinces, as the Bloc Quebecois suggests?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, it must be said that the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal wants the two taxes to be harmonized, as do the Quebec Chamber of Commerce, the Quebec manufacturers' association and the PQ candidate, but not the member.

• (1425)

I must tell you that it is clear for the Conseil du patronat that most of the interested groups and individuals in Quebec want harmonization; most of them do not agree with the Bloc Quebecois on that and on everything else as well.

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INTERPROVINCIAL TRADE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister.

While Ottawa and the provinces had promised to conclude an agreement on interprovincial trade liberalization by June 30, negotiations now appear to have broken down. According to the daily *La Presse*, the federal negotiators are even talking about a possible failure of negotiations if several provinces start asking for more and more exceptions.

My question is as follows: As negotiations are continuing in Toronto today, can the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that these negotiations have stalled because several provinces want to preserve the ability of their government corporations to intervene?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): I think that the hon. member has answered his own question, stating as he did that negotiations are continuing as we speak. Naturally, if they are continuing, this means there is no breakdown.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, I gather that the Deputy Prime Minister has not taken part in very many negotiations.

I will nonetheless put this supplementary question to her: Will she confirm the ministerial statement to the effect that the federal government is now contemplating not signing an agreement it considers flawed? Does this failure not confirm yet again the inability of this government to negotiate with the provinces?

[English]

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the member across the way has just stated that the negotiations are continuing. There is no

breakdown of negotiations. The discussions and the negotiations are continuing and we expect that they are going to bear fruit.

I know that hurts the Bloc Quebecois. I know the Bloc Quebecois would like to see the negotiations fail so it can continue to repeat its false accusations that Canada is not working.

In fact, Canada is working. Over the course of the last six months we have signed in every ministry of this government harmonization agreements with the provinces to make government work better.

I am sorry that does not follow the Bloc's plan, but it certainly follows the Liberal government's plan.

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TIME ALLOCATION

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the government House leader who in March in this House invited me to bring to his attention excessive use of time allocation and closure.

I would like to share some quotes with the House on the subject of closure. The member for Ottawa—Vanier said that it was far from being democratic. The member for Winnipeg St. James called it a draconian device. The member for Kingston and the Islands said it was morally wicked. These are quotes from Liberal members who now sit on the other side of the House.

Does the government House leader concur with his colleagues' description of closure mechanisms?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, the comments quoted are quite relevant when there is excessive use of closure.

Unfortunately for the hon. member's question what happened yesterday was not closure. We used the time allocation rules of the House and they were not used to force a decision on the House. Instead they were voted by a majority of the parties in this House, plus the NDP. That is democracy.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster): Mr. Speaker, several amendments were brought forward in this House and received almost no debate as result of closure motions, time allocation and closure, I might add.

Members of the current government when they were in opposition consistently maintained that these activities were contrary to democracy and the free operation of this House. Now we have the same members over there defending the use of closure to rush bills through the House before they have received adequate and normal public exposure or scrutiny.

How does the government House leader explain, justify, defend this basic inconsistency, this awful compromise?