

You understand the tradition in Parliament is that when we establish a Committee, we give that Committee freedom to establish its own agenda. I've gone much farther than Ministers have gone in my memory, in indicating my disposition, but it's the Committee's business. It's not my business, it's the Committee's business and insofar as whether we are going to delay 5 months, 10 months, 2 years a decision on trade matters with the United States, no, I'm not going to put Canadian jobs at risk like that. No, I'm not going to put our strategic interests at risk like that. What I'm doing is offering, through Parliament, the people of Canada the full opportunity to take part in discussions of these important questions. The Liberals and the NDP for narrow political reasons are denying the people of Canada that right.

Q: Well, sir, if you're not going to allow the recommendations, wait for the recommendations in advance of your decision ...

SSEA: Look, if the Committee is formed and if the hearings are held and if there are 3 months of public participation which I am proposing, a consensus will emerge before we have to make the decision. That's very clear. That means that we'll have the benefit of that consensus. We will also be respecting the parliamentary process. The Liberals and the NDP do not want to do that. Ask yourselves who is holding up progress on this matter? Who is now stopping Canadians from being heard? I'm not. I'm proposing a Committee and I'm also indicating a timeframe, at least 3 months in which consensus can be built. But the NDP and the Liberals refuse to get the process started. That's where we stand and I deeply regret it. I think it's anti-parliamentary. I think it's anti-democratic. I think that it limits the breadth of the base upon which we can make our decision and I hope that over the week-end, they'll cool off a little bit, stop playing politics with this important issue, and recognize that for the first time in Canadian history, there's been an opportunity for Canadians to take part in the discussions of international relations and let us get on with it.

Q: Might this expression of consensus take the form of an interim report?

SSEA: That's a decision of the Committee. It's not my decision. I can't dictate that to them.

Q: No, but do you think that would be a good idea?

SSEA: That's their decision.

Q: Or a special pole across the country?

SSEA: That's their decision. I am establishing here, or I'm trying to, if the Liberals and the NDP would let me do it, I want to let the people in. I also want to let the Committee establish its own working rules. I've indicated my pre-disposition, indeed, my interest and so far the Liberals and the NDP keep finding new excuses. That is what's quite remarkable about this. When this began, the NDP's reason for objecting was that they didn't have enough members in the Committee.