

Oral Questions

Mr. Chrétien: I would like to ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he read that document, and if we can take it as the sum of the brains and talents of the Government when it tells us that we will have a committee and at the same time the Government intends to make decisions on a daily basis, making a farce of participation by the Canadian public?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I really do not understand the negative attitude of the former Minister. Here we have a process which is unique; for the first time ever a Green Paper on foreign policy has been produced for public discussion. This has never occurred before. Already, without even approaching such discussions in a positive way, the Opposition is ridiculing the consultation and public discussion process. But that is exactly what it is—to stimulate and encourage public input with respect to our foreign policy.

Yes, I can tell the Hon. Member I have read that document and it is stimulating, and hopefully—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Axworthy: You don't need very much.

Mr. Nielsen: It takes a good deal more to stimulate the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Fort Garry than it does me.

Mr. Axworthy: You'd be surprised.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Get hold of Len Hopkins.

Mr. Chrétien: I am very sorry. I have known the Hon. Minister since 1963, and his admission that he read it and found it very good means he has gone down in my esteem very rapidly.

UNITED STATES STRATEGIC DEFENCE INITIATIVE

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the Deputy Prime Minister says it is a serious discussion, but, if it is, will the Government agree that the committee to be formed can have public hearings right now and that, as it concerns his own Department, we will be consulting Canadians right now on star wars, and not wait to make the report after the decision has been made by the Minister?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Here they go again, Mr. Speaker. They howl about having the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence obtain a reference about NORAD, but my colleague, the Government House Leader, has made offer after offer to those opposite to bring a NORAD reference before the committee so it can be discussed, and they refuse to have that discussion.

● (1420)

I am surprised at the Hon. Member, because he used to be a lawyer. Most people would want to come to value judgments based on facts. He knows as well as I do that we are now in the

process of gathering those facts through a group headed by a very distinguished civil servant, Dr. Kroeger, who is marshalling sufficient information upon which some value decisions might be made.

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[Translation]

NORTH AMERICAN AIR DEFENCE

STAR WARS—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence that I am in charge of that committee, and that the offer made by the Government House Leader was never transmitted to me, not by him, not by yourself nor by the Secretary of State for External Affairs.

Seriously, before we agree to put up names for this committee, I would like to ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the Government is willing, at this time, to make consideration of Star Wars a priority, as well as the question of trade with the United States, which is now the subject of negotiations, and if the Government agrees to priority consideration of these two issues that are of major importance to Canadian policy, we will sit on this committee, and if the Government does not agree with these priorities, we will have to tell Canadians that it is just another exercise in public relations, and the Canadian people will start getting thoroughly fed up.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

[English]

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I really would have expected more from a responsible Opposition. The Hon. Member has said that the Official Opposition is adopting the same abdication of responsibility which is to be expected from the NDP, namely, the abdication of its responsibility to participate in the parliamentary process. The NDP made up its mind long ago that it would not do that. I would not have been a bit surprised to hear that from the NDP, because it has always had difficulty in coming to grips with the parliamentary process. However, I am really astonished at the irresponsibility of the Official Opposition taking that kind of stand.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Perhaps all Members might remember that at the end of Question Period yesterday all Members asked that everybody be able to hear. It is amazing how quickly we forget. The Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Fort Garry.

KROEGER INQUIRY

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg-Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of the somewhat over-