



Liberals threaten to boycott talks on foreign policy

By Val Sears, Toronto Star

OTTAWA — Liberal MPs say they will boycott a committee set up to assess a foreign policy discussion paper unless the government gives priority to tackling the issues of Star Wars research and trade with the U.S.

Party leader John Turner yesterday called the paper — released by External Affairs Minister Joe Clark — an "insult to the intelligence."

And the joint Senate-House of Commons committee is a "farce," Turner said.

Outside the Commons, New Democrat MP Steven Langdon (Essex-Windsor) said his party wants the same issues dealt with quickly but wants to keep its options open about any boycott of the committee.

Clark absent

The committee, which will take a year to report, is to hold public discussions across the country and also may travel to other parts of the world.

Clark was not in the Commons to hear his discussion paper roasted; he was in Montreal promoting it in a series of television and print interviews.

The Liberal's external affairs critic, Jean Chrétien, told reporters that a decision on whether Canada will participate "in Star Wars is a matter of weeks (away), and the bilateral agreement on trade with the United States is for September.

"So there's no use our discussing such matters after the horse is out of the barn."

Star Wars is the popular name for the Strategic Defence Initiative — a research project with the goal of destroying nuclear missiles in outer space. The U.S. has invited its allies to join the program.

Clark has said that the government is ready to make foreign policy decisions while the committee meets, but that those decisions might be changed to reflect the committee's recommendations.

The government's Green Paper poses a series of questions about Canadian policy on defence, trade, disarmament, Central America and Canadian-American relations. It offers no policy positions.

Commitment wanted

Turner told reporters that, unless a decision on Canadian participation in Star Wars research is withheld until the committee reports, the committee hearings will be "absolutely irrelevant."

And the same point applies to any tightening of Canada's relationship with the U.S.

"We don't intend to participate unless we get a better commitment from the Prime Minister than we got from the deputy prime minister," Turner said.

Deputy Prime Minister Erik Nielsen told Liberal and New Democratic spokesmen that they had little respect for parliamentary democracy if they stayed away from the committee hearings.

Prime Minister Brian Mulroney was not in the Commons. He did turn up after question period, but ignored reporters' questions on the issue and went right to his office.