

Canadian Trade Policy

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there consent to allow the hon. member to complete his remarks?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Stevens: I thank hon. members for their patience. I should like to continue and I shall be brief. You would expect that the Canadian government is much more attuned to what Canadian producers are experiencing. This rarified approach, this attitude that somehow an elitist group in Ottawa or Geneva knows best, in today's volatile and changing world, shows once again the government's disregard for those who must bear the brunt of its policies. It is not enough for Canada to hope and pray that the world economy may turn out to our benefit. As a major trading nation, we should be aggressively in the vanguard, establishing a meaningful position for our people to allow them adequate competition in the markets of the world. This requires selling, not only abroad but it requires a review sector by sector, industry by industry, of our capabilities in Canada to determine how we may most successfully tap the world's potential trade. In this process, rather than run from the advice of Canadians, rather than shelter itself from comment—yes, even criticism—the government should actively pursue ongoing discussions so that they may better understand the wishes of Canadians.

Regardless of what the Prime Minister and his cabinet may feel, the fact is that you can trust the Canadian people. They would like to help with regard to these trade negotiations. I say to the government, why not ask for their help? Why not consult with those who are going to be most affected? Who knows, even this government may make fewer mistakes than they have been wont to make to date.

Mr. Kaplan: Will the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. It is not for the hon. member to decide, as his time has expired. This can only be done with the consent of the House. Is there consent to allow the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Kaplan) to ask a question?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Kaplan: Mr. Speaker, in his allegations about secrecy the hon. member neglected to mention a consultative process with industry of which he is very much aware because he participated in it. I want to ask whether he did, indeed, participate in this consultative process and meet with the Canadian GATT negotiators. Perhaps he can share with the House for a moment or two his impressions of that process.

Mr. Stevens: If I may reply to that, Mr. Speaker, I take it the parliamentary secretary is referring to an opportunity I had to attend a briefing given to the Canadian Institute on International Affairs in Geneva. Mr. Rodney Grey, the head of our negotiating team there, gave us the Canadian position. Mr. Long, the director-general of GATT, gave us an overview concerning the GATT negotiations in world perspective.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker.]

I say to the parliamentary secretary that the briefing I received as a member of that group is one of the reasons we are having this debate. I, and business people who were in attendance at that briefing, were shocked at the decisions that were to be proposed in Geneva with absolutely no reference to this parliament or to the people of Canada. I was shocked to hear that the negotiations are decided by the whim of one minister, the Minister of Finance. If he says, "Do," it is done. If he says, "Don't do," it is not done. It is time the government got away from this secretive approach, opened up and let the people understand exactly what is being proposed in these negotiations.

I thank the parliamentary secretary for asking me this question, because he could not have hit the quick more. The fact is that the government is totally non-committed to an open course with respect to trade negotiations at the present time. Unfortunately, it may have a devastating effect on our economy and, most important, on those who rightfully can expect jobs to be created in this country and to create a meaningful approach to trade as far as Canada is concerned. Canada's future is an international future, and it is time we ended secretive discussions such as those which have been taking place in Geneva.

Mr. Max Saltzman (Waterloo-Cambridge): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the remarks of the hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens) with great interest. I agree with him on the importance of this issue. However, it seems to me that if rhetoric were the coin of the realm, we would all be tinkling with prosperity instead of just clanging in confusion. The confusion is on both sides of the argument.

The hon. member for York-Simcoe accuses the government of secrecy. He should know better than that. It is not that they are secretive; it is just that they do not know what they are doing. The problem is that when we look at the statement made by the hon. member for York-Simcoe, we are not sure where they stand, either. It is fine for the hon. member to say to the government that we want to know what they are doing because we do not think they are a good enough target. However, I would dispute that with the hon. member. I think the government has made itself into quite a target. It is all right to say to the government, "State your position on free trade so that we can work on it." The other question is, what is the position of the Conservative party on free trade? Let me be frank, Mr. Speaker, and commence my remarks by saying that this is a serious and important debate. I would tell my friends on the right, with the greatest respect, that it does not further the cause of this debate not knowing where the official opposition stands on this issue. How can you have a debate when you do not know where the sides stand?

• (1550)

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Tell us where you stand.

Mr. Saltzman: I will tell the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) where I stand. I was expecting that, and I happen to have a note on it which I will pull out. It is quite