

Oral Questions

the hon. member that we are doing everything possible to reassure the people of Chatham that we will stand behind the commitment we made in November when I was there.

• (1440)

REQUEST THAT COMMITTEE HOLD PUBLIC HEARINGS

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Minister of National Defence. He has just announced today, April 6, the setting up of a committee that he announced in December he would establish. There has been a four to five months time lapse. Will the minister assure the House that this committee will be charged with holding public hearings? Will he explain to the House why this is a committee of officials and will he explain why he does not trust members of this House of Commons to conduct a public inquiry into this question?

Hon. J. Gilles Lamontagne (Minister of National Defence): Madam Speaker, I do not believe the Leader of the Opposition understands the problem.

As the Leader of the Opposition is aware, we have an interdepartmental committee looking into defence infrastructure, and this committee looked at the Chatham area. As we are phasing out the 416 Squadron, we have a commitment to the Chatham area to find equivalent in economic activities and employment opportunities for that region.

Under the direction of several different ministers, among them the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion, we have now set up a special committee to ensure that we look at the Chatham area as a priority specifically so that we can arrive at a solution in 1984.

SUGGESTED PARLIAMENTARY STUDY

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, I understand perfectly that the Liberal government is shutting down the Chatham Base when it does not need to do so. I understand perfectly that the Liberal government is setting up a committee of officials, of public servants, who will shut out public inquiry. This is a democracy. Why trust everything to public servants? Why will the minister not allow this public question to be looked into by a committee of elected members of the House of Commons?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Hon. J. Gilles Lamontagne (Minister of National Defence): Madam Speaker, I fail to understand why the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition is telling us we are not democratic. In fact, I announced last November to the Miramichi Chamber of Commerce that the 416 Fighter Squadron would be leaving Chatham. Certainly everything was open and above board. I believe we asked an interdepartmental committee to find out how we could meet our commitment to the citizens of Miramichi to maintain the same level of employment and

economic activity in the region when 416 Fighter Squadron leaves in 1984. I think it is perfectly normal to ask our officials to look into this and prepare a study. I feel that, subsequently the ministers concerned will act according to their responsibilities and see what they can do in this area.

REQUEST THAT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE BE ESTABLISHED TO CONDUCT INQUIRY

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): I have a supplementary, Madam Speaker. I fail to understand why the minister is so afraid of the members of this House and of the Parliament of Canada. I do not know why he always seems to prefer public servants. The matter is quite simple. Why not have an inquiry by a parliamentary committee and do this in a democratic way? Why hide behind public servants? Why not have a parliamentary committee in order to have a full inquiry, a public inquiry, so that members on all sides of the House will be able to do for the citizens of New Brunswick what hon. members for northeastern New Brunswick are not prepared to do themselves.

Hon. J. Gilles Lamontagne (Minister of National Defence): Madam Speaker, I think it is very sad to see the Leader of the Opposition using the people of Miramichi to indulge in petty politics—

Mr. La Salle: Give a straight answer, it's not that difficult. Sit down if you don't have an answer—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Lamontagne: I feel everything is quite straightforward. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned being afraid of democracy. The arrangements were made and the decision was announced last November. We met with the municipal council and the Chamber of Commerce. I had two meetings with the Premier of New Brunswick, Mr. Hatfield, who is coming here tomorrow for further discussions. So, everything is above board, and all the parties concerned in the Miramichi area will be informed about what we intend to do, and together we will decide what is to be done.

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[English]

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

REQUEST THAT SURTAX BE IMPOSED ON IMPORTED JAPANESE VEHICLES

Mr. Derek Blackburn (Brant): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of State for International Trade. In view of the fact that he seems to be banging his head against a brick wall these days with respect to imports of Japanese cars and trucks, and in view of the fact that the Minister of State for International Trade said in this House that his primary responsibility was to protect Canadian jobs, will the minister now impose a temporary emergency 15 per