

Oral Questions

However, the Minister for International Trade stated yesterday that environmental and labour issues "should not be at the core of a free trade agreement".

Is it the policy of this government that the environment and labour questions should instead be peripheral? Or, does the minister agree with President Clinton and indeed with the Official Opposition that the environment and labour side agreements should be utilized to improve significantly the agreement itself?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and Minister for International Trade): I am surprised, Mr. Speaker, that my hon. friend has tried to distort what I said yesterday.

The point I was making yesterday, and I will be quite clear, is that the trade remedy laws are at the core of a free trade agreement. The environmental and labour issues the U.S. administration is trying to address, and we have been trying to address since I raised this at the meeting in Montreal in February of last year, are parallel agreements to the free trade agreement that are not a central part of the agreement itself.

Both Mr. Clinton's objectives and the objectives of Canada are of the same nature: not to address the core nature of the agreement but to improve some of the elements surrounding the agreement in relation to the environment and labour.

Hon. Roy MacLaren (Etobicoke North): Mr. Speaker, the situation is now becoming clearer. The President of the United States says that these two matters, environment and labour, are so central to the NAFTA that he will not even take the legislation forward without agreement on those side accords.

What is the Canadian government's position: central or peripheral? The government is introducing the legislation tomorrow.

• (1435)

Let me ask the minister this question. The President of the United States said yesterday that NAFTA is not simply a trade agreement. It is an investment agreement. He added: "the investment provisions of NAFTA will be needed to be used in ways that will raise wages" referring to Mexico and the United States.

Could the minister explain from the recent talks among Canada, the United States and Mexico what the U.S. administration means by changing the way the investment provisions will be interpreted with regard to Mexico and the United States, and does Canada support such modifications and changes?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to give my hon. friend a full briefing on this matter, but the side agreements on labour and on the environment do not change in any way the investment provisions of the NAFTA. Those provisions of the NAFTA stand.

What the United States, what Canada and what Mexico are interested in is precisely the same. We want to see economic activity in all three countries increase and that is going to be a primary result of the North American free trade agreement.

For my hon. friend—I cannot understand why he is saying this—to say that the environmental agreements are central to a trade agreement is simply not true. It is not accurate. It does not bear any resemblance to reality.

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FISHERIES

Hon. Roger C. Simmons (Burin—St. George's): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans who so far, unfortunately, has nothing to show for his efforts to reach an agreement with France on the cod quotas. He will know that St. Pierre fishermen have made no bones about their intention to get a bigger piece of the action. He will also know that France now wants to send the quota issue to another international tribunal.

If France refuses to back away from that particular stand to send it to a tribunal, what is the minister then prepared to do to end the stand-off with respect to the cod quotas so that the Grand Banks based scallop fishery can resume?

Mr. Speaker: Just a moment. The question is hypothetical. The minister may want to deal with it.