

Supply

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, it is worth noting at the outset, with respect to an issue which has been promoted by the Government as being one of the most important international economic initiatives, that the first opportunity for Parliament to debate the topic is on an opposition motion well over one year after the initial proposal was launched. This only underlines the basic philosophy which, unfortunately, is the hallmark of the Government; that is, keep people in the dark. I suppose the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) was raised on too many mushrooms as a young child. He became addicted to the fact that mushrooms are grown in the dark by throwing a lot of manure at them to make sure they flourish. That is the problem we have in this debate.

Perhaps there will be an opportunity today to cut through much of the confusion, many of the contradictions and the deliberate camouflage which has been raised about trade matters. They have only confused many Canadians with respect to what the objectives of the Government are and what the end results will be. What passes for debate is the Prime Minister calling people names. When one does not have a good argument one resorts to name-calling. There has been no specific set of mandates placed before Parliament which can act as the basic parameters for our negotiators. There have been but a series of incredible ironies and contradictions between Ministers and between the parties in the negotiations. The end result is that each time we turn around we are losing a bit of the edge in terms of the trade negotiations.

The passive, convoluted approach which has been taken thus far has placed us in a trade position which puts us on the defensive, as the Minister for International Trade (Mr. Kelleher) has admitted. We have been placed in a position in which we must respond, as opposed to being able to take the initiative. Nowhere is that clearer than in the issue as it relates to lumber.

Three or four weeks ago an interesting debate took place in the Senate Finance Committee of the United States about whether or not the committee would approve a fast track approach. At a late hour, after last minute log rolling took place, the Prime Minister swept down the grand staircase of the Langevin Block, like some apparition out of the time of Marie Antoinette, to announce that it had been a great victory. He said that it was a clean launch, that there were no preconditions and that everything would be wide open. However, as we looked at the fine print we saw that Mr. Reagan had promised the Finance Committee that he would send it a letter about lumber in which he would assure members of the committee that their deep concerns about their constituencies would be properly met.

We asked some questions about that matter the next day and the Prime Minister, as only he can do, rose to the height of his pomposity to say: "Oh no, don't worry. It was a clean launch and there were no problems". We now have a copy of the letter sent by Mr. Reagan to his Senators. Not only does the letter include the words expressed by the initiator of this

motion, but Mr. Reagan went even further to say that he wants a solution to the problem before he can recommend comprehensive negotiations to the Senate Finance Committee. He said there is a clear declaration that there will be separate negotiations on lumber and other irritants. That was confirmed last night at a meeting of the External Affairs Committee when Deputy Chief Negotiator, Mr. Ritchie, said that there will be separate negotiations in this area. That statement puts the statements made by the Prime Minister three or four weeks ago into total disrepute. Once again, we are faced with a problem of not being able to accept the word of the Prime Minister because it does not hold for more than 24 hours.

We are now in an incredible situation in which the Government is launching a negotiation on comprehensive free trade at the same time as it is negotiating with the Americans. They are demanding more tariffs, more controls and more limitations on free trade. Yet the Government is telling us that the answer to our problem is in this comprehensive negotiation, except in the problem areas which have been identified by the American Government as being specific irritants. They are pharmaceuticals, intellectual property and lumber. In those areas they want separate negotiations. Those separate negotiations are designed to limit trade and to restrict it. They will bring the barriers higher and not lower. Yesterday, the Minister said in the House that that was the very reason we started comprehensive negotiations. Many of these irritants will not be included as part of the negotiations. They will be subject to separate negotiations which must be resolved, according to President Reagan, before he recommends a comprehensive agreement.

Goodness, gracious, what is going on? What type of convoluted intellectual gymnastics is the Government going through that it can persuade itself that it will solve the problem on lumber through comprehensive negotiations while at the same time it agrees, through a special envoy, to get into separate negotiations on that very same subject? It is hard to believe that grown-up, mature men and women holding positions of responsibility in the Government could actually delude themselves into thinking that somehow they have a solution to a problem when they have created an even bigger one.

All we want to do in this debate is find out where the Government stands. Are we back to where the Prime Minister said we were? Are we back to having no preconditions, no separate negotiations, with everything on the table as part of the bilateral comprehensive negotiations? Or is President Reagan right when he says in his letter that he will start separate negotiations and that he will reach a separate deal before he recommends anything back to the committee?

Our Prime Minister and the President are supposed to be good friends. They are supposed to have a little phone which they can pick up everyday and wish each other good morning or good night. Surely, they might decide to get together and at least arrange to have a common position. If they do not have one, something which I suspect is more the case, then we have