

Oral Questions

My question is for the Minister.

[Translation]

Across the country, millions of Canadians have said no to this tax. When will the Government listen to Canadians and withdraw the GST? When?

[English]

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, I am very much aware that Canadians do not like paying taxes. I do not think anybody likes taxes, but we all understand that taxes are necessary if we want to have the programs and services that Canadians demand.

I am sure that when my hon. friend spoke to the group of people that were on Parliament Hill today he took a good deal of time to explain to Canadians the nature of this tax, not just use rhetoric. I am sure that is exactly what he did. It is important for Canadians to understand the details of the tax, how it is going to benefit low-income people, how it is going to benefit our exporting industries and how it is going to benefit small business by removing the tax on their inventories. The members opposite say, "Come on, Mike". These are the facts.

Ms. Clancy: We say how?

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): My friend from Halifax says "how". I would suggest she read some of the documentation and that is where she will find the answers to all of these benefits.

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ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, my question is addressed to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister has just returned from Central America and in a few weeks he leaves for the Soviet Union. I would like to first ask him about his trip to Central America.

As he will know, previous Canadian Prime Ministers and heads of government in Latin America have often expressed the concern about Canadian membership in OAS in relationship to the power American foreign policy seems to play within that organization.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister how he can really believe we will be in a position to have independent sources of information that are crucial to an

independent Canadian policy when our government has announced cut-backs in our foreign service in Ecuador, Brazil and Guatemala. Is this not a contradiction to be joining OAS precisely at the time we are cutting back on our diplomatic service?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, there is never obviously a perfect time to do anything. You make value judgments about problems and opportunities and that is what a government is supposed to do.

I tell my hon. friend that we were well satisfied after the visit to Central America that this is a decision very much applauded by all governments in Latin America. They view the Canadian presence there in an extremely positive way.

I refer my hon. friend to some observations made by a distinguished Canadian, the Hon. Paul Martin, Sr. who as minister of external affairs promoted this idea for many years. It is a value judgment that the Government of Canada made. Past governments have refused to join the OAS. This government believes the time was right, that the opportunities are there, and we believed it was appropriate for this government to provide the leadership for this to come about.

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's answer had nothing to do with the question which was how are we going to have an independent policy if we do not have people on the ground to give us independent information?

With reference to the need to have an independent foreign policy in this country, on the weekend the former Canadian ambassador for disarmament had this to say about American pressure in Canadian foreign policy. He said that the Secretary of State for External Affairs himself had been pressed by the Americans to stop Mr. Roche from his pursuing disarmament matters at the UN in the manner that he was. Mr. Roche specifically said that the Secretary of State for External Affairs said his work was "too vigorous" in pressing for disarmament.

• (1430)

I ask the Secretary of State for External Affairs, is Mr. Roche accurate in this? Did the United States put direct pressure on the Secretary of State for External Affairs and, if so, what was the Canadian response?