

Oral Questions

sions with him, I am now able to advise the House that the seat to be occupied by him in future will be number 265.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1417)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**ALLEGED CANDU AGENCY SCANDAL—GOVERNMENT INVESTIGATION**

Mr. Allan Lawrence (Northumberland-Durham): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Secretary of State for External Affairs. I wonder if the government of Canada has given any reply to the government of Argentina with respect to the very sharply implied criticism by Argentina that the Canadian government was dragging its feet on any meaningful government investigation of the Candu agency scandal, as evidenced by the note handed to our government on November 17 last by Argentina.

Why were the contents of that note hidden from the public accounts committee of this House while the matter was still being investigated by that committee? Why did it take from November 17, 1977, to February 21, 1978, before the minister even had the good grace and manners to produce that note for the public accounts committee?

Hon. Donald C. Jamieson (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, as usual, in starting to ask a perfectly legitimate question the hon. member has to throw in some rather stupid curves which tend to distort the whole issue.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jamieson: There was no hold-up as far as I was concerned. I think the record will show that we have responded to every request for information made by the hon. member. In this particular case, when we received the note I had to get clearance from the Argentinians to make it available. In addition, there was a period during which, as the hon. member knows, I was out of the country. There was no particular delay or anything unusual. I reject totally and completely the quite uncalled for charge which has been made.

Mr. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear the minister's reply with regard to whether a reply had been given to Argentina. Has there been any formal communication between the Canadian government and the government of Italy on this matter? Why, when the key man in the whole Argentinian Candu scandal is an employee of an Italian corporation of which the Italian government is a major shareholder, has there been no pressure put on the Italian government for co-operation and assistance from Canada's so-called partner in this whole matter?

[Mr. Speaker.]

Mr. Jamieson: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure whether the word "pressure" is an appropriate one, but we have made representations to the Italian government on a number of occasions. I believe the hon. member, or the committee, has had copies of those representations. I think the hon. member also knows that the government of Italy—I am recalling this from memory, but I am reasonably certain I am correct—has indicated that it cannot go beyond what it has already done.

The hon. member is shaking his head. I ask him to give me an opportunity to check the record to be sure. Certainly, verbally, I have been told that there is nothing that can be done. On the other hand, I say to the hon. member—or perhaps, more appropriately, I should say this to the chairman of the public accounts committee—that if the committee has any formula it can devise which would make it capable of being put to the Italian government in a way other than we have already done, I am certainly prepared to do it. Indeed, I will transmit any message the committee wishes to prepare.

Mr. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, because this matter is before the House and is now a parliamentary matter rather than a committee matter, certainly the government owes it to the people of the country and to this House to take the initiative and exercise some leadership instead of dragging its feet all down the line. Swiss legal authorities and even Swiss government officials have informed me that there are a number of ways of proceeding if the Canadian government wants to get at the truth of this matter. The Canadian government could be making other attempts either through Swiss courts, the Canadian courts or the Swiss government, rather than making a single, feeble and half-hearted attempt to break the Swiss numbered bank account secrecy.

Canadian taxpayers' moneys were deposited in Swiss numbered bank accounts. What other attempts has the minister, his departmental officials or the Canadian government taken to find out who received that Canadian money through those Swiss accounts, besides the single, feeble and unsuccessful attempt which has been made?

Mr. Jamieson: Mr. Speaker, let me first deal with the preamble to the hon. member's question. When the hon. member gets into his debating and argumentative style, quite frankly it is hard to pick the substance out of the tremendous amount of verbiage with which he surrounds the issue.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1422)

Mr. Jamieson: In so far as his first comment is concerned about the government not having dealt with this matter other than through the committee, surely it has been said repeatedly in this House that it was a matter for the committee. I undertook to do whatever the committee asked. The committee never argued with that proposition. Yesterday the report of the standing committee was issued and the hon. member did not even let 24 hours go by before asking what the government was going to do on another course.