

Oral Questions

● (1420)

REQUEST FOR MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Prime Minister. I believe he would agree that over the last three or four days the primary source of information has been a form of sidewalk soliloquy by his press secretary and not information which has been given in the House of Commons.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister whether we can get assurances from him that he would be prepared to table the documents which changed hands this week between United States and Canadian officials and that tomorrow in the House, when his Principal Secretary returns from Washington, the Prime Minister or one of his Ministers will make a statement clearly outlining what is the present state of action in the negotiations, whether they will be resumed, what position the Canadian Government is taking in responding to those actions, and what concessions have been made on both sides.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, with all the respect that I have for my own Director of Communications, Mr. Phillips, he has not been the primary source of information in this regard. He has been there to be helpful to the media in responding to their concerns.

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Minister for International Trade, the Deputy Prime Minister, and I have been fully responding to inquiries all last week with regard to this. We have been forthcoming in providing my hon. friend, plus all Members of the House, with all relevant information.

My hon. friend knows full well that I have indicated many times that we will provide, at an appropriate time, all the information that he would wish upon which to make an appropriate value judgment.

At the moment there are discussions ongoing in Washington, and I know that he would want to do nothing that would compromise the possible success of those discussions.

PURPOSE OF DELEGATION

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister. Since the Prime Minister is unwilling to give us any real information on why this meeting involving his Chief of Staff and two of his Ministers is taking place, and in view of the fact that last week the Government not only suspended the free trade talks with the United States but said that Canada would not go back and that instead the United States had to come to Canada, isn't the only conclusion Canadians can draw from what is happening that the American Ministers are going to be receiving Canadian Ministers and Derek Burney who are coming to Washington with a view to doing nothing else but caving in and giving in to the Americans on their essential demands?

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): Isn't this the only reasonable conclusion that Canadians can draw from this strange spectacle which the Canadian Government is staging?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend refers to the Ministers "coming to Washington". In point of fact the Minister of Finance, the most senior Minister of the Government, has been in Washington for the last number of days—

Mr. Lapierre: Poor Maz.

Mr. Mulroney: In view of the indications that have been forthcoming—

An Hon. Member: You are not senior any more, Maz.

Mr. Mulroney: If my hon. friends would like the answer—in view of the indications that have been forthcoming from the Americans, it was deemed appropriate to ask the Minister of Finance to remain there to listen to their point of view.

The Minister for International Trade is there and the Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, and I would not think that my hon. friend would find anything untoward in our responding to an action by the Government of the United States which may prove helpful at this time.

POSITION OF CANADIAN GOVERNMENT

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, wasn't the only action by the Government of the United States a two-page letter it sent late last week to Ottawa and which Simon Reisman said, after seeing it, was totally unacceptable because it did not represent any change whatsoever from the position the Americans were taking which led to the free trade talks being suspended?

If that is the case, I want to ask the Prime Minister, whether or not the Minister of Finance was already in Washington—and he was there for the IMF meetings and nothing else—isn't the fact of the matter that the Canadian Government took an initiative, which it said it was not going to take, to crawl to the Americans to get the talks started in a desperate effort to restore the remaining shreds of credibility of the Prime Minister on this failed, useless, and harmful free trade initiative.

● (1425)

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, we all know of the Hon. Member's deep antipathy for the United States of America. We all know of the anti-Americanism that permeates every statement the officials of the Liberal Party make. That is not the intention of this Government. That is not the true feelings of the people of Canada.

We are not negotiating with the people of the United States as we would negotiate, as he would suggest, with a hostile foreign power. We are negotiating on a country to country,