

certain services that do not now exist, in exchange for a more efficient use of public funds in the general field of health insurance.

Mr. Graffey: Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask a supplementary. Does the minister think that we can expect results very soon?

Mr. Lalonde: The goal was to complete consultations around the month of October.

* * *

[English]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

ILO CONFERENCE—CANADIAN VOTE ON RESOLUTION TO ADMIT PLO AS OBSERVER

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I direct my question to the Minister of Labour and ask him how the Canadian government voted on the resolution before the International Labour Organization conference on the question of admitting the Palestinian Liberation Organization with observer status to the conference?

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I would advise the hon. member that our delegation there participated in the debate under the direction and with the advice of our Department of External Affairs. I think the right hon. gentleman's question would more appropriately be directed to the Secretary of State for External Affairs.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I hope the minister was not an automaton over there. He having been there, I asked him how the government of Canada voted. That is a simple question to the minister who knows, not to some other department.

An hon. Member: He can't remember.

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the question of the votes that were polled at the ILO with respect to the PLO were the subject of instructions which I issued to the delegation early last week or maybe a few days before that. There were two major resolutions, one a combined resolution calling for the admission of African liberation movements and the PLO to attend as observers at the ILO. On that resolution Canada abstained. A second resolution was proposed by the workers' groups—Canada, Australia and the United States, I believe—which stipulated that no observer group could attend the deliberations of the ILO unless it recognized the existence of all member states. Canada voted in support of that resolution, which unfortunately was not carried by the organization itself. It was a resolution which was intended to assert Canada's interest in the continued independent and sovereign existence of Israel as a state, and an indication that we expected all who would join the deliberations at the ILO would accept that fact, including the PLO itself.

An hon. Member: Why did you abstain in the first place?

Oral Questions

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, the explanation indicates something of a bad conscience. I simply asked the question as to how the Canadian delegation voted. The Minister of Labour apparently did not know, although he was there heading the delegation. The Secretary of State for External Affairs said we abstained on that question but voted on another one, which was defeated. As last fall, in the vote at the United Nations concerning the application of Arafat, the PLO, to appear and speak on the rostrum of the United Nations, Canada raised the battle standard of "abstain," I wonder if this abstention had anything to do with the desire on the part of the Canadian government to do nothing which might annoy the PLO or the Arab nations.

● (1430)

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I think the explanation is clear. In many international bodies, resolutions are presented but they are not prepared on a consensus basis and do not reflect, in many cases, what Canadian policy is, and to vote either for or against those resolutions would be to grossly misrepresent Canadian policy on particular issues. We have always stated that the Canadian government feels that the Palestinian people should be represented, for example, at deliberations which have a bearing on the future settlement in the Middle East. I believe that position would be supported by most hon. members, if not all hon. members, in the House of Commons. But we refuse to take the position that the PLO itself should be one of or the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. That is why, on these particular resolutions which involve two aspects, namely, the rights of the Palestinian people and the PLO as an organization, we have consistently abstained. We have been in extremely good company in that abstention.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I never heard a reply more verbose and less clear. Was the representative of the Department of Labour attending the International Labour Organization conference at Geneva giving government policy when he said, as reported, "We don't want to prejudge the right of the Palestinian people to choose for themselves the organization which would represent them"? Was that government policy, was it simply an evasion, an attempt to explain the situation in order to please the people of Israel and the Canadian Jewish people, or does the statement represent a policy which has been determined on the basis of what is best for Canada?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, it is obvious to me at least that this is a policy which serves Canadian interests and makes for the objective and balanced approach which successive Canadian governments have attempted to follow in connection with the Middle East situation. That is the background to our policy position on this matter. I think it is fully understood by the government of Israel.

Mr. Diefenbaker: But not by the Jewish people in Canada or elsewhere.