

Canadian Trade Policy

Mr. McKenzie: Also with respect to this aspect—Mr. Speaker, has my time run out?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): I regret to interrupt the hon. gentleman, but the time allotted to him has expired. Nevertheless, he may continue with unanimous consent. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Bob Kaplan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, this debate, at which I have been present from the beginning until now, has covered many subjects and issues, but there are two in particular which have generated a lot of heat, from the opposition, particularly from the hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens). These are the two issues with which I want to deal because they reveal the tremendous extent to which the hon. member has tended to over-state his case. He has done it before, and he has done it again in this debate. He talked at some length and with considerable heat about the current economic performance of the economy.

It is no secret that the government is not content with the current performance of the economy, and we are working to change it and to improve it, but to argue, as the hon. member did, that there are deficits all over the place is just wrong. He argued that we had a deficit in trade. He should know better because figures have been available to him showing that the merchandise account of Canada is now in a surplus position and that the Canadian economy is performing there at a surplus. That doesn't mean that will continue—

An hon. Member: That's right.

Mr. Kaplan:—but when he went on to say that we had adopted short-run policies with the objective of winning popularity, how far from the truth could he be? We know that the controls policies which have been introduced are not popular. We chose them because we think they are the right policies. We hope that in time, and with additional measures, the Canadian economy will begin to perform to the standard all Canadians would like, but to argue that we play the short term to win popularity is really ridiculous.

In any event if the Tokyo Round, which is only just under way in Geneva, is successful, it will produce an agreement which will not come into effect until the middle 1980's. To relate current economic performance to charges about the negotiations now going on at Geneva is to introduce an element of hysteria into this subject. The business community and all sectors in Canada affected by whatever agreements are reached will have years and years to organize their affairs in an orderly way, with full knowledge of what is coming, to take advantage of whatever agreement we are able to negotiate in the interests of the Canadian economy. There will be lots of time.

The second issue on which the hon. member attempted to generate quite a lot of heat was the issue of secrecy. He began by saying that the government's negotiations were being carried out absolutely in secret, with no one being taken into our confidence and with no one in the economy having any knowledge of what is going to happen, of what is going to be done and what is being proposed. He did not admit, until I asked him a question after he had completed his speech, that he himself was briefed in Brussels by the negotiating committee.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Kaplan: The hon. member did not indicate that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) has also been fully briefed by the negotiators. The Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Chrétien) indicated today that the briefing had been a full briefing and that he had instructed his officials to tell them as much as there was to tell, to tell them the whole story, and when the hon. member indicated in his reply to my question how angry he was about what he had learned, I think what he was angry about was discovering something he perhaps had not realized, and that was that these negotiations are terribly important to the future of Canada.

Perhaps the anger of the hon. member should have been directed somewhat to himself and to members of his own party for their failure to recognize a long time ago that this is an important issue.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kaplan: It is an issue upon which they ought to take a position, and they have not done so. They have continuously been saying to us in their heckling and in their comments that they want to know the position of the government. Well, that indicates that they have not paid any attention to anything which has been done by way of preparation for the Tokyo Round, because back in 1973 when the Tokyo agreement was signed by the then minister of industry, trade and commerce, who is now the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Gillespie), he set out very clearly what our objectives would be, where we stood on free trade, where we stood on non-tariff barriers, and where we stood on the sectorial approach.

I want to argue that we have put more on the table than has the American government, for all the structures the Americans have established. I want to come back and talk about those in a moment, but for all those structures any Canadian—even a member of the opposition—who wanted to take the trouble to read the public record would have a better idea of where we stand on the upcoming round at Geneva than the Americans do about their own government's position.

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): They don't know.

Mr. Kaplan: Five major objectives were laid out with respect to the Canadian bargaining position at GATT.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): You think GATT is a firearm, Joe.