

Oral Questions

It appears the government has invoked a new doctrine of ministerial accountability which states that the less a minister knows the less a minister can be blamed.

Can he confirm that this policy of calling witnesses just affirmed by the minister extends to the calling of the former Clerk of the Privy Council, Mr. Gordon Robertson, who will testify about ministerial accountability and responsibility?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister Responsible for Constitutional Affairs): Mr. Speaker, two things: As my colleague, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, outlined in her submission to the committee, there is a well accepted principle with regard to ministerial responsibility, not only accepted by this government but at the McGrath report hearings accepted unanimously by all members of this House.

An hon. member: Oh, oh.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): We are following that practice. Now Ms. Copps seeks to change the topic, so let me deal with the second matter.

The second matter is, as I indicated, if there is a request from the whole committee that will be considered.

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• (1430)

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister for industry and international trade. There were 15,000 more people unemployed in the month of May. Full-time jobs have fallen by 330,000 since this time last year, and the most recent economic report from the Bank of Montreal says that the recovery is going to be weak and sluggish. People, in short, are hurting. I want to ask the minister if the government will act against one of the key reasons for this economic damage. Will this government take Canada out of the free trade deal and give us back our economic independence?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, I do not think the hon. member is telling anybody on this side of the House that people are hurting. We understand that and it is something about

which other ministers and myself have expressed a good deal of concern.

For the hon. member to say that we should get out of the free trade agreement tells me that the hon. member is not understanding the impact of the free trade agreement on the economy. There is no question we have been in recession, but if we had not had the free trade agreement we would have been in a deeper recession because the trade surplus with the United States has gone from \$14 billion in 1988 to \$17 billion in 1990. Our exports to the United States have increased by 12 per cent during that period, and we have seen a net change in the net flow of foreign direct investment into Canada, a change in the net positive basis for Canada, of \$6 billion. All of those have created jobs in this country and have ensured that the recession is not more serious in its impact.

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, the minister likes to talk about the trade surplus. Let us talk about the whole current account balance because the fact is Canada had a current account surplus with the United States in 1988 and since the trade deal we have had a deficit of over \$3 billion. That means lost jobs.

Is this minister prepared to start to do something about the whole host of problems with this trade deal, the fact that our energy policy moves are blocked, the fact that we are not able to make the moves to give Canadian content in our various industries, all those things that are stopping new jobs from being established in this country? Will this minister in fact give us back our independence as a nation?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, my friend asked a question originally about the free trade agreement. The free trade agreement affects exports and imports and that is what I was referring to in the current account balance which includes interest and dividends. To suggest that this is integrally woven into the free trade agreement, my friend could go back and understand that that is not the case.

He is looking for a degree of independence. We are gaining a degree of independence by the fact that we are following policies that are designed and will strengthen the economy of the country. It is with the strengthened economy that we will strengthen our independence as a nation.