

• (1120)

MOTION TO ADJOURN UNDER S. O. 29

SUSPENSION OF FREE TRADE TALKS

Mr. Speaker: I have two applications for emergency debates today. I will hear the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy).

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I think this is the fourth day in a row that we have asked for an emergency debate on this very crucial item. I think we have come to your Honour's Chair as often as the Government has gone down to Washington, cap in hand, to try to get the talks reignited.

The Speaker's wisdom has been once again demonstrated. By waiting until today to have an emergency debate we have obviously caught the crescendo of the times at its absolute most important point. The Cabinet is assessing this morning whether or not the talks will continue or whether they will sell out the country, to use a phrase of my colleague.

We have not yet had an announcement from the Government. It may be that you in your wisdom, Mr. Speaker, may want to defer a decision on this application until three o'clock in order to learn whether the Government is finally prepared to make a public statement in this House concerning its position on the free trade talks.

Mr. Speaker: I wish to advise Hon. Members that I also have an application on behalf of the New Democratic Party. I will now hear the Hon. Member for Essex—Windsor (Mr. Langdon).

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, I must say that it is becoming a habit to put the argument to you that there is at present a tremendous need for an emergency debate. There are three points which make it essentially crucial.

First, there is a tremendous amount of information which the Government has not seen fit to give Canadians about the course of negotiations as they are occurring. We have not, for instance, received information which the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) suggested was received yesterday. The letters which were exchanged over the weekend between the Governments have not been tabled. As a consequence, it is unclear what the key issues are with respect to the discussions which are presently taking place between the two sides.

I am informed by my House Leader that due to the legislative agenda for this week it would be very difficult to find room for a Supply day on which to discuss this issue. I think, therefore, that both for the information needs of the country and for the potential of Members of Parliament to contribute to the decision-making process, there is a very strong case for an emergency debate at this stage.

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Since I understand that the Cabinet is meeting this morning on the issue, I suggest that it might make sense if you, Mr. Speaker, were to defer your decision until three o'clock at which point we would have a sense of whether the Government has a statement to make.

Mr. Speaker: In the interest of all Hon. Members and also in the interest of the public that is watching and listening, I emphasize again that while a matter may be of very great importance it may not, in the opinion of the Chair, be a matter which on any given day is appropriate for an emergency debate.

The public should know that there has been a series of applications by both the Official Opposition and the New Democratic Party each day asking for an emergency debate. The Chair has declined each day to order an emergency debate but on each day has stressed that the matter is of great importance.

There is generally an admonishment to the Speaker not to give reasons for decisions and I have refrained from doing that, although Hon. Members will know that what goes on in the Speaker's head probably has something to do with what the Speaker says. I would like to be able to say that of all Hon. Members.

The suggestion this morning is that I might defer both of these applications until later on this afternoon to see what may happen later today. I think the better practice would be for me, with great politeness and courtesy, to reject the applications at this time. As I have said repeatedly, that fact, of course, does not prevent anyone from making another application at another time.

I want to say one thing which I think may be helpful. The suggestion has been made that the Speaker has very generously agreed to review the Speaker's rulings on the emergency debate each day. For the record it should be noted that the Speaker is not reviewing past rulings. The Speaker is taking each application as it is made on each given day. I think that is proper procedure.

I point out again that although a matter may be very important it may not be appropriate, in the Speaker's view, to order an emergency debate. I want to make it very clear that the Speaker certainly views the matter as important. We will see what transpires.

Members will note that last week I suggested there might be some conversations among the Government, the Official Opposition and the New Democratic Party with regard to another way of having a debate. It is not for me to direct anyone in this House as to what they might do in speaking with each other. However, that may be something which could be considered.

In any event, that is the ruling for this morning. I thank Hon. Members for bringing the matter to my attention. I also want to thank both opposition representatives for their