

Oral Questions

[English]

POSSIBILITY OF INCREASING ALLOWANCES FOR THE BLIND

Mr. Jack Marshall (Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe): One of the main recommendations was with regard to the financial restrictions placed on the blind because of their special needs. Is there any agreement between the minister and the provincial ministers with regard to increasing the allowances afforded to the blind in all provinces, even though the provinces have opted to include them under social assistance?

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): There is nothing to prevent the provinces from increasing their special allowances to the blind. If they decided to go ahead with this, these allowances would remain eligible for the 50 per cent sharing of the costs with the federal government, under the Canada Assistance Plan; the initiative must come from the provinces.

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[English]

FINANCE

CANADIAN POSITION AT GATT TALKS IN GENEVA

Mr. Jack Murta (Lisgar): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a question to the Minister of Finance. Is Canada's trading position in the current GATT round of talks in Geneva aimed at trading gains in processing of our resources in exchange for opening Canadian markets to manufactured goods from abroad? This is the impression coming out of the talks on Canada's position at the present time. If this is the case, does the minister realize that under present economic conditions in Canada such a policy will mean the end to much manufacturing in this country?

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, our objectives are much more complex than that. They would include not only securing better access for Canadian manufactured goods but, as the hon. member mentioned, more highly processed goods in foreign markets. It will also, to an important degree, be directed at trying to reduce the non-tariff restrictions to the importation of Canadian exports which have been so effective in some countries, much more effective than the tariffs in keeping out Canadian exports. Naturally, we expect that we in turn will have to pay for these further advantages in terms of tariff changes in Canada. As I say, our objectives are far more complex than the simple proposition with which the hon. member prefaced his question.

Mr. Murta: Mr. Speaker, I realize the objectives are more complex than I stated in my question. However, I wanted to see if I could put that particular feeling on the record in the time available to me. Is Canada still pressing ahead with its sector negotiations and will the United States support Canada's position in pressing for sector talks?

[Mr. Lalonde.]

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, Canada has indeed put forward a proposal of these specific sectors which might be the basis for negotiations as opposed to across the board tariff cuts. The procedures to be followed not only by Canada but other countries in the multinational trade negotiations are still under negotiation. In other words, there is not yet an agreement on rules. It is too early to say whether the United States or any other country will give that support. I think it is fair to say there is a very full understanding of Canada's position in this regard.

DATE WHEN GATT TALKS LIKELY TO BE COMPLETED

Mr. Jack Murta (Lisgar): Can the minister say when he expects the GATT talks going on at Geneva to be completed? Some months ago it was thought that the end of 1978 might be the final date for the completion of the talks and we would move into the new economic order in the early eighties. Is this still the timeframe being looked at or will the talks possibly go as late as 1980?

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I hope they can be brought to an end before 1980. However, given the experience in the Kennedy and Tokyo rounds up to this point, I think the expectation indicated in Puerto Rico that they would be finished in 1977 is now realized as being unrealistic. Perhaps 1978 may be optimistic.

Mr. Steven E. Paproski (Edmonton Centre): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. I have asked the Minister of State (Multiculturalism) (Mr. Guay) a couple of questions in the last month or so since he has assumed the office. He undertook to write me a letter showing that the government has a permanent policy on multiculturalism. On May 2, 1977, as reported at page 5171 of *Hansard*, he said:

● (1500)

It will take me the better part of about an hour to give all the details the hon. member is requesting. If you will permit me to do so, Mr. Speaker, I will be glad to give them to him. If not, I will give them to him in writing.

I just wanted to ask the minister today whether he really has a policy and, if so, how long must those who are neither Anglophone nor Francophone in this country have to wait until they learn what it is. Will they have to wait until the next election?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Joseph-Philippe Guay (Minister of State (Multiculturalism)): The reason I did not answer the hon. member is this: he is making a farce of this important subject. That is why I demanded to know yesterday where the hon. member's party stands with regard to multiculturalism.

Mr. Paproski: Where do you stand?

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): Everybody in this House knows what our policy is with regard to multiculturalism. If the hon. member wishes to have additional information I am quite