

Oral Questions

business—stop holding up Parliament, stop holding up the right of the people to be heard.

KROEGER INQUIRY

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, the Minister knows that he is doing what we sometimes affectionately describe in this House as indulging in stonewalling. He has not dealt with the issue. If the committee is to be relevant, if it is to be serious, and if we are to take the opinions of the people of Canada seriously in a decision making sense, it should make an interim report, and the Government should make a commitment that it will not make a decision on the matter until it sees that report.

Since we have now learned that Dr. Kroeger, who is heading a committee to investigate the star wars project from the Canadian point of view, is reporting directly to the Prime Minister, and since we have had a different view of the committee's role, even from the Minister himself as expressed by the Defence Minister, does the Secretary of State for External Affairs speak for the Government on this matter, or will whatever he decides ultimately be ratified, possibly revised, changed, and reversed by the Prime Minister?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member is asking two questions today. Let me answer the first one in my capacity as Acting Prime Minister and Acting Minister of National Defence.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): In those capacities we have absolute confidence in the judgment of the Secretary of State for External Affairs, and we can offer that categorical assurance to the Leader of the New Democratic Party.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): Stonewalling is the practice of people who stop progress.

Some Hon. Members: That's right.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): We want to establish a committee that will let the public be heard. The Liberal Party is stopping that committee. The New Democratic Party is stopping that committee. They are stonewalling. We are saying that we want to follow the unusual practice of establishing a joint committee which will let the public be heard, and we want to follow the normal practice of letting that committee establish its own agenda.

I have indicated our views on the kind of agenda that we would welcome. We would welcome discussion on SDI, we would welcome discussion on trade and on other questions. Most of all we would welcome a committee, and we would ask why the opposition Parties continue to refuse to let the people of Canada be heard.

TIMING OF GOVERNMENT DECISION

Mr. David Berger (Laurier): Mr. Speaker, my question is also directed to the Secretary of State for External Affairs. It is difficult enough trying to figure out what his position is when he holds one position; today he is holding two positions and I suppose the pregnant question is this: Has the Secretary of State for External Affairs consulted the Acting Prime Minister? He has not yet clearly stated his position and the position of the Government. He has said that the Government will make a decision sometime in the next three or four months. Will he tell us what will be the date of the Government's decision, so that this supposed committee will be able to plan its work? Will he assure us that the Government will await the conclusion of full public hearings on star wars before coming to a decision?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, it is impossible to give a precise date. What I have given is the period of time within which the Government expects to be called upon to make a decision, in the Canadian interest and on the Canadian timetable, on the American invitation to participate in research in the Strategic Defence Initiative. We have already told the Americans that we will not accept their artificial deadline, and I think we would be foolish to impose other artificial deadlines on a process which must come to a decision.

Surely the Hon. Member must know that if Parliaments or Governments are interested in delaying decisions, there are innumerable ways to do that. The Party of which he is a member delayed for years a decision on the North Warning System. Not only did they not bring it to Parliament, they did not bring it to decision. The New Democratic Party has been debating for eight years its position on NATO. They still have not made up their minds.

• (1130)

Mr. Broadbent: Yes, we have.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): The Hon. Member for Oshawa has made up his mind. The Hon. Member for New Westminster-Coquitlam has not made up her mind. The process can go on, and on, and on, without decision. Governments have a duty to decide. They also have the duty to allow the people of Canada to be heard. That has not been allowed in the past.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

CANADA-UNITED STATES FREE TRADE PROPOSAL

Mr. David Berger (Laurier): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to figuring out ways to postpone decisions, the Government is developing a certain expertise. In the area of defence the most important question facing Canadians today is star wars.

There is another question which the Minister has addressed in his paper. That is the question of free trade, which will affect every aspect of Canadian life. Considering that free trade with the United States will mean major changes in our