

Oral Questions

ENERGY

SYNCRUDE PROJECT—SUGGESTED DEBATE BEFORE FEDERAL COMMITMENT MADE

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister. In view of the Speaker's ruling on Wednesday against the necessity for an emergency debate on the Syncrude project on the ground that the government, if I may quote him, "must come to parliament for approval in some way or other", and considering that the Speaker added that if he should prove to be wrong in that judgment he would rule in favour of an emergency debate at a later point, I should like to ask the Prime Minister whether he will assure the House that parliament will have an opportunity to debate the agreement before the government commits itself in a final way to the project.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, there is certainly a commitment which was made at the meeting in Winnipeg. If the hon. member is thinking of having a debate before further steps are taken, I would answer that there are two possibilities. The first is that a supplementary estimate will, of course, be needed to provide these funds, early in March I think it is, and the debate could take place then.

As the House knows, the government House leader is prepared to find time for important debates of the nature the hon. member is talking about. Last night was an experiment taken with that in mind, and the government is prepared to repeat this kind of setting aside of special time for debates of great importance to the House and the nation, providing some arrangement is made between the House leaders to expedite passage of other legislation. The House realizes that we have much to do before the end of this session, and we would very much encourage any steps taken by the House leaders together to permit the House to concentrate on vital subjects such as this, providing that the time the government gives up for these debates is traded against expediting other less urgent matters which are before the House.

SYNCRUDE PROJECT—NATURE OF AGREEMENT—CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED BEFORE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OBLIGATED

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. In his answer in the House yesterday he said that an agreement in principle was reached between the government and the principals in the project. I should like to ask the minister whether he could tell the House if this agreement in principle was a written agreement, or was it just a verbal agreement concerning the minimum involved of \$2 billion? Further, would he inform the House of the precise conditions he was alluding to that the government would have to feel certain would be fulfilled before it would consider itself obligated to the agreement?

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, I confirm the response that I gave yesterday that the agreement on Monday night was not rendered in writing. It was an agreement in principle

[Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton).]

and will be subject, of course, to the negotiation of a rather detailed contract in legal form between the governments involved and the existing consortium. I would have to say that the consortium agreement is a rather complex legal document involving the question of sharing of technology and the position of various participants in respect of the land, and it is required to make certain that the government will be given full opportunity in all these areas I was referring to when I talked about the conditions we had in mind.

SYNCRUDE PROJECT—REQUEST FOR TABLING OF ECONOMIC VIABILITY STUDY

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that the answer on Wednesday by the President of the Treasury Board did not make perfectly clear whether the government had the Alberta study on the project for consideration before it entered into the agreement I should like to ask the minister to clarify that position. Did the government have such a study and for what period did it have it before it reached a conclusion? If it did not have that study did it have other independent studies, and will the government table either the Albertan study or others so that we can have a look at them?

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, we did receive from the Albertans a number of studies that had been done by outside consultants concerning the economic viability of the project. I can say in general terms that they confirmed the conclusions my own officials had reached as a result of their examination and audit of the Syncrude figures. As to the question of tabling the document, I do not think the property right is ours directly, but I would be glad to consider that. Of course, before any document of that kind could be tabled in the House it would have to be translated, but I will give full consideration to the suggestion.

[Translation]

SUGGESTED COMPETITION FOR INVENTORS TO FIND WAYS OF SAVING ENERGY

Mr. Réal Caouette (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, I should like to put a question to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources.

In view of the energy problems we are up against in Canada, would the minister consider the possibility of launching competitions amongst inventors in Canada who could help create new energy and make better use of the one we already have? There is talk of shortages in the future. For instance, inventors of automobile carburetors and other equipment could encourage saving energy. The contests should be of interest to Canadian inventors with regard to patents.

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, I had occasion to answer a similar question put to me last night by the hon. member for Rimouski. I must say that for the time being we are not considering such competitions in Canada, but the suggestion is very useful. We have now completed a study of federal research and development programs with regard to