

THE CABINET

MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE SENATE

Senator Olson: Honourable senators, I should like to raise what I think is an important matter. I am wondering whether the Leader of the Government will undertake to let us know tomorrow, or at least soon, to whom we should direct our questions.

There are three ministers in this chamber who have specific departmental responsibilities—that is, they are responsible for details respecting those departments or activities of those departments—and in that respect we do not have any problem. There is, however, a problem as to whether or not these ministers are going to answer questions on matters of policy—economic policy, social policy and, in some respects, international policy. It would save a lot of time if we knew to whom these questions should be directed.

Senator Flynn: Honourable senators, perhaps I should prepare a written reply to dissipate any doubt that there might be in this regard. May I suggest to the honourable senator that in previous Parliaments, when there was only one member of the administration—namely, the Leader of the Government—in the Senate, all questions were directed to him, following which he went and sought out replies. Unless he was given prior notice of the question, he would go to the appropriate minister for a reply.

The situation in this place is now very much improved and, as is now obvious, honourable senators opposite are interested in putting a good many questions to members of the cabinet in this place. We will deal with those questions as best we can.

Subject to any prepared reply I might give tomorrow, each minister in this place is responsible for his department. If a question does not relate to one of those departments, it should be addressed to me, and I shall deal with it in the same manner as did the previous Leader of the Government—and probably better.

Senator Olson: I have a further supplementary question. The minister no doubt recalls being in Calgary a few days ago and advising people that the top priority of this government was freedom of information. Reference to that was also contained in the Speech from the Throne. So, I presume that in addition to having three times as many ministers here, we are going to have this “practice what you preach” attitude, with the result that we can expect to get answers more rapidly. I would ask the minister, therefore, to assure us that this is going to happen in regard to questions of policy. Specific details obviously have to be sought out.

Senator Flynn: As policies are defined by the government, they will be announced. While the policy of greater access to government information will not make the process quicker, it will make it wider. That is the purpose of the legislation, as I understand it.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

SALES POLICY RESPECTING CANDU REACTORS

Senator Thompson: Honourable senators, I have a question for the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. As I read the speech given by the Minister of External Affairs to the United Nations Assembly, she had, in a most eloquent manner, listed a number of countries which, in her opinion, had drastically violated human rights.

Is it the policy of the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce, therefore, to instruct his department not to pursue an active policy of selling Candu reactors to the countries listed by the Minister of External Affairs in that speech?

Senator de Cotret: Honourable senators, that is a question that has been discussed between myself and the Minister of External Affairs. I can assure honourable senators that there is no difficulty whatsoever in terms of actively pursuing the sale of further nuclear technology to Argentina.

Senator Thompson: But with respect to any country that has violated human rights, there would be no problem?

Senator de Cotret: There would be no problem with respect to Argentina. I can assure honourable senators that if the Minister of External Affairs felt strongly that a country was violating human rights, she would bring that to my attention, and we would act accordingly.

● (1600)

Senator Thompson: I think she has brought it to the attention of Canada and the world through her speech to the United Nations. Having brought to your attention the violation of human rights in those countries, what is your intention with respect to the sale of Candu reactors to those countries?

Senator de Cotret: I think that question has already been answered. We have not been able to sell the Candu reactor to Argentina. There was full consultation between myself and the Secretary of State for External Affairs. There is no conflict in our approach to this. We have insisted on total safeguards, and I think our position is very clear. However, should the question arise again we will deal with it at that time. I should hate to try to answer a hypothetical question about the future when there is no active case under consideration.

ENERGY

MEASURES TO ENCOURAGE REDUCTION IN CONSUMPTION

Senator Austin: Honourable senators, I should like to address a question to Senator de Cotret in his dual ministerial capacity. In so doing, let me say that I very much welcome his presence in the house and the increased vigour with which I believe our question period and our debates will be conducted, and in particular the flow of economic information I believe we will be getting as a result of his being here.

I might say in parenthesis that I still do not understand the difference between his capacity as Minister of State for Economic Development and that of other economic ministers such as the Minister of Finance or the President of the Treasury