

suggesting that that was an example of Conservative cabinet solidarity?

However, in the case which he has cited here this afternoon—

Senator Murray: “Cases.”

Senator Perrault: In the cases he has cited here this afternoon, the matters discussed by the minister have not been fully developed and finalized by cabinet. In the meantime, individual members of cabinet are surely at liberty, and should be at liberty, to discuss with their constituents and other Canadians their views with respect to those policies, pending a time when a cabinet decision is taken. Their freedom in that regard has always existed.

Hon. Martial Asselin: No, no.

Senator Perrault: And, may I say, this freedom seems to be in remarkable contrast to the actions which I cited earlier, the contradictory statements by the two former Conservative ministers. During the same week they made contradictory statements about a policy which surely had been adopted in cabinet.

Senator Asselin: Name them.

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, I don't want to debate—

Hon. Jacques Flynn (Leader of the Opposition): —the irrelevancies.

Senator Murray: I do not want to debate the constitutional practice, but the reason why there is cabinet secrecy, again, is so that ministers can debate in private their differences on matters of public policy; then later, when ministers go public, it is assumed that those differences have been resolved in the secrecy of the cabinet chamber and that the Canadian people are, therefore, in a position to know that when a minister speaks on a matter of public policy that minister is speaking for the government.

Finally, without prolonging this unduly, let me ask the minister whether his colleague, the Minister of State (Mines), the Honourable Judy Erola, is speaking for the government when she says in an interview that opinion is divided among federal cabinet members on what status should be accorded municipal government. Is that the fact?

Senator Perrault: Well, honourable senators, the matter has yet to be resolved in cabinet. The other day, for example—

Senator Flynn: Why don't you say “yes”?

Senator Perrault: The other day in Ottawa, for example—and this is worthy of some consideration—the minister responsible for housing in this country, the Honourable Paul Cosgrove, convened a meeting of certain regional parliamentarians, Conservatives, Liberals, members of the NDP and others to discuss with them the future of housing policy in the country. Senators were included in these consultations. During the course of that meeting the minister suggested initiatives that he, personally, thought might be helpful. It remains to be seen whether all of the initiatives which he espouses personally

[Senator Perrault.]

will ultimately be supported by his cabinet colleagues. But this process of dialogue is surely a useful one. There is a continuing dialogue involving ministers and other members of Parliament with groups, organizations and individuals. Following adoption, of a policy in cabinet, certainly the doctrine of cabinet solidarity is in effect—as the Honourable the Leader of the Opposition indicates by nodding his head in agreement.

● (1435)

Senator Flynn: Yes.

Senator Perrault: But surely it is useful for ministers to attempt to set forth some of their personal views as a prelude to that cabinet decision-making process.

Senator Flynn: May I suggest to the Leader of the Government that he look at the question which was put to him and compare his reply with an alternative, which would have been, very simply, to say “Yes”?

Hon. G. I. Smith: He is too defensive about it.

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

REVENUE GAINS AND LOSSES CAUSED BY FOREIGN EXCHANGE FLUCTUATIONS

Hon. Duff Roblin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): May I address a question to the Minister of State for the Canadian Wheat Board? I do not know whether he was watching television last night, but a number of us were, when the Canadian Wheat Board came under some scrutiny in the program presented by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. It raises a couple of matters on which we perhaps need further information.

One of the points made was that in the middle 1970s there was a loss incurred in foreign exchange transactions in connection with sales of wheat to China on the sterling basis. The sum mentioned was approximately \$80 million. I suppose that from time to time the Wheat Board does have problems with foreign exchange, and I am wondering whether the minister can make available to us their record of gains and losses on foreign exchange—for any period he likes, but let us say for the last 10 years. That information would, I think, be pertinent in view of what was said.

Hon. Hazen Argue (Minister of State for the Canadian Wheat Board): Honourable senators, I am quite happy to ask the Wheat Board to supply whatever information it feels is desirable and pertinent on that question. There has been a good deal of information provided on that point. I believe the controversy is at least a couple of years old. I will be happy to have the records checked to see what information I may be able to provide for the honourable senator.

I too saw the program, and it was obviously a biased, one-sided, prejudiced attack on the Canadian Wheat Board.

Some Hon. Senators: Oh, oh.

Senator Argue: Conservative members can laugh and giggle if they wish. Leading that attack were the Minister of Agriculture for Alberta, the Honourable Dallas Schmidt, the Minister