

Oral Questions

Hon. Alastair Gillespie (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): I am sure the hon. member is aware that the first ministers will be meeting early in May to discuss this very question.

Mr. Gillies: Because of the uncertainty surrounding the pricing of Canadian oil, can the minister give a categorical assurance that the price in Canada will not be allowed to exceed the average price in the United States?

Mr. Gillespie: That is one of the questions the first ministers will want to discuss.

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THE BUDGET

INQUIRY AS TO DATE OF PRESENTATION

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): A related question, Mr. Speaker. In the light of the answer given by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, will the Minister of Finance tell us whether the budget will follow shortly after that first ministers conference, bearing in mind the pattern set last year when the budget followed shortly after the agreement was reached with respect to the increase in the price of oil? Would May 17 be a fairly good date?

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of Finance): The Prime Minister has suggested May 5 and 6 to the premiers as dates for the first ministers meeting. I have suggested the last two weeks in May. So May 17 is within that two-week period.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

CONFLICTING STATEMENTS CONCERNING FRENCH LANGUAGE UNIT AT GREENWOOD—REQUEST FOR CLARIFICATION

Mr. J. P. Nowlan (Annapolis Valley): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Defence. It has nothing to do with such an esoteric thing as high finance and more to do with the sensitivity of French language units in the armed forces. Last week, the Secretary of State for External Affairs was in the Annapolis Valley for many reasons, one of which was to make a speech before the Board of Trade in which he said, among other things, that no decision had been made regarding the French language unit squadron at Greenwood and that "preparations and proposals were being worked on in the Department of National Defence". Yet six weeks earlier, on February 11, General Dextraze, speaking at the same type of meeting in Moncton said, and I quote: "No amount of exercise on the part of anyone will make me change my mind on this." He was referring to the French language unit squadron at Greenwood. My question to the minister is: which one of these gentlemen is levelling, who is telling it correctly and has a decision been made?

Hon. James Richardson (Minister of National Defence): No formal and final decision has been taken, but

[Mr. Gillies.]

the Chief of Defence Staff was expressing the views of the department and my views.

Mr. Nowlan: Bearing in mind the high degree of interest in this subject across Canada where French language unit squadrons are being considered, would the minister undertake, in order that the public might be informed before a decision is taken, to make some type of statement either in this House or outside it, outlining not only the 18 French language unit squadrons presently in existence but defining the three experimental ones which are presently in place and especially outlining the 17 which are proposed in different parts of the country?

Mr. Richardson: The hon. member may not be aware that other bases using long-range patrol aircraft would be pleased to have a French language unit. Perhaps we shall have to close down Greenwood.

Some hon. Members: Oh!

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● (1500)

PUBLIC WORKS

REQUEST FOR DETAILS OF CLEANING CONTRACT INVOLVING CIVIL SERVANT

Mr. J. R. Ellis (Hastings): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Public Works. Earlier in the question period this afternoon the minister refused an inquiry into the problem in Toronto. Would the minister give the House a few answers to the specific problem there and tell us who was fired and when? Since we are rather well into the question period, Mr. Speaker, and I probably will not be able to get in a supplementary, may I ask whether the contract was on public tender, when was it let, was it a low tender, and what is the current status of the contract?

Hon. C. M. Drury (Minister of Public Works): Mr. Speaker, the situation in Toronto is currently under investigation by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The incident to which I referred concerning a contract in which a one time civil servant had been involved was in Ottawa, not Toronto. The contract has since expired and the public servant is no longer with the public service.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Annapolis Valley is rising on a question of privilege.

Mr. Nowlan: Mr. Speaker, I have a very definite point of privilege. In view of the answer of the Minister of National Defence, which absolutely shocked me, I should like to know, in terms of my duty as a member, whether I am entitled to ask serious questions about government policy, pending or proposed, without the minister, in reply, suggesting that parts of the answer will be blackmail of that particular member or some other persons in this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nowlan: I was trying to elicit information on a matter that is highly sensitive and I am very much aware of the sensitivity of the issue. I was absolutely appalled when the minister inferred that perhaps government