Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): That is a total distortion, and it always was.

SYNCRUDE PROJECT—REASON FOR INABILITY OF GOVERNMENT TO FINANCE AS PUBLICLY-OWNED PROJECT

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the minister that bears directly on the answer he has just given. Considering that the most recent estimate of the cost of the Syncrude project is $2 billion, which is what the government has accepted, and keeping in mind that the province of Quebec was able in the past, on its own, to raise some $14 billion for the James Bay project, would the minister explain to the House what considerations led the federal government to reach what on the surface is the preposterous conclusion that the federal government was unable in terms of its own resources to raise $2 billion, in order to make the Syncrude project a totally publicly owned and controlled one?

● (1440)

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, the government of Canada has a fiscal framework in which it has to operate, and it expects to take only so much out of the gross national product of the country for its own operations. On that basis there is a rather considerable amount for energy projects but no more. The decision was made in the light of the fact that we expect, for example, to be having requests for additional financial assistance from Manitoba for hydroelectric development and as has been referred to in the House, from Newfoundland for hydroelectric development, for nuclear development from the province of New Brunswick, for a project for the building of a connecting line across to Prince Edward Island, and, of course for a substantial development through Petro Canada in the Arctic area and in the Beaufort Sea when that company is incorporated.

Mr. Broadbent: All of which adds up to less than the cost of the James Bay project, but I would like to ask the minister, in view of the conflicting answers given by the Prime Minister and the President of the Treasury Board yesterday, one suggesting to the House that the ceiling of the commitment of the federal government was $300 million in the Syncrude project and the other suggesting that there was no ceiling but a 15 per cent commitment, if the minister would inform the House who was correct, the Prime Minister or the President of the Treasury Board, or would he tell us if either was.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: With due respect that question was answered unequivocally.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I point this out to the hon. member only to remind him that I am not able to permit the repetition of a question which was asked earlier in the same session, and that question was asked yesterday and answered, as I recall, by the President of the Treasury Board.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: If there is a challenge of that I may permit it, but I cannot permit a repetition of the same question.

Mr. Broadbent: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. With all respect, Your Honour, to your position, I should like to suggest that we were given two different answers in the House yesterday, one by the Prime Minister and one by the President of the Treasury Board, and in fact a third answer was given before the television cameras outside. It is an issue of profound importance not only to members of this House, but to the people of Canada that we get clarification of the financing of this project, so I suggest with respect, Mr. Speaker, that you permit the question because it demands an answer.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: I may have misunderstood the hon. member's question, but I understood it to be regarding whether the participation was 15 per cent, and I understood the President of the Treasury Board answered yes, that that was so. If that is not so, I will permit the question. Would the hon. member repeat the question.

Mr. Broadbent: My question to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources is: would he explain to the House in clear terms the extent of the federal government's commitment to the Syncrude project? Is there a $300 million ceiling; Is there any ceiling; or is the government committed to paying 15 per cent?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: That is not what you asked to begin with.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. member for repeating his question, but he has done nothing but satisfy my mind that that is precisely the question he asked of the President of the Treasury Board yesterday afternoon.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Hamilton West.

* * *

LABOUR CONDITIONS

ALLEGATIONS AGAINST SEAFARERS' INTERNATIONAL UNION—GOVERNMENT POSITION ON HOLDING INQUIRY

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister. In light of the fact that over two months have elapsed and I am sure that the Prime Minister has had some input from the Solicitor General and the Minister of Justice with respect to correspondence from the province of Ontario regarding the SIU matter, I wonder if the Prime Minister can advise the House now whether the government has made up its mind in regard to holding an inquiry, and if not, why this