

He said: Honourable senators, I should explain that copies of both reports of the Committee of Selection will be distributed before you are asked to deal with them.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when shall this report be taken into consideration?

Senator Petten, with leave of the Senate and notwithstanding rule 45(1)(f), moved that the report be placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration later this day.

Motion agreed to.

SYDNEY STEEL CORPORATION

EXPLOSION AT PLANT—EXPRESSION OF SYMPATHY

Hon. B. Alasdair Graham: Honourable senators, before we proceed to Question Period, I should like to make a brief statement with respect to the sad events which took place at the Sydney Steel Corporation plant last week.

As many of you know, yet another tragedy hit the industrial area of Cape Breton when, last Thursday at approximately 9.30 p.m., an explosion at No. 1 blast furnace, operated by the Sydney Steel Corporation, resulted in the untimely death of three outstanding employees of the company and outstanding citizens of the Cape Breton community. It also resulted in injuries to two other men. One of those injured has since been discharged from hospital, and the second is reported to be in stable condition. It is, indeed, a blessing and of some comfort that the number of victims was not greater.

This tragedy has struck at a time of the year when happiness should be the order of the day. In recent months there were many good reasons for happiness at Sydney Steel. The rehabilitation program was on schedule and within budget. The plant was turning out what many regard to be the best steel rails ever produced at Sydney Steel and, for that matter, in all of Canada.

I was at my home in Sydney, about one mile from the plant, when the furnace erupted. The shock waves were felt and heard for many miles around. Like many others, I went immediately to the plant. I had an opportunity to meet there with management and union officials who, with their coal-mining brothers in the area, long ago learned to cope with adversity and uncertainty.

Amidst the sadness and the sorrow there is a degree of optimism. The officials are confident that within two or three weeks they will be restored to the situation which prevailed prior to the accident. In the meantime, I understand that between 70 to 80 employees have been laid off while repairs are being implemented.

I am sure that all honourable senators, and particularly my esteemed colleagues from Cape Breton, Senators Macdonald, Muir and Murray, would want to join with me in an expression of deepest sympathy to those families who have suffered bereavement and injury, as well as to all their brother steelworkers in the area.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

● (2050)

QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

THE SENATE

ABSENCE OF MINISTERS

Hon. Arthur Tremblay: Honourable senators, I have a question for the Acting Leader of the Government—

Hon. Martial Asselin: Will you allow me to rise on a point of order, before you ask your question?

Senator Tremblay: Very well.

Senator Asselin: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order I would appreciate clearing up a matter which is somewhat embarrassing to us. That point of order of course concerns the Acting Government Leader in the Senate.

We have a Question Period. And usually our questions are put to Ministers of the Crown according to our Standing Orders. Ministers of the Crown alone share Cabinet solidarity, and they alone can take the responsibility of answering for and on behalf of the Cabinet.

But we are now faced with a situation where oftentimes Ministers of the Crown in the Senate are not in attendance. I am not blaming them. We know they have Cabinet responsibilities, and from time to time they have to discharge those responsibilities outside this House.

But this deprives the Opposition of a right under our rules. I mean the right to address questions to Ministers of the Crown on all Government actions, the right to ask questions and supplementaries. Admittedly, the position of the Deputy Leader of the Government is a difficult one. He cannot himself take the responsibility of answering on behalf of the Cabinet, because he is not a Cabinet member. He must then take our questions under advisement, discuss them with the Minister who is responsible and come back to the Senate with an answer from the Minister.

This is preventing senators in this House from discharging their responsibility to seek information.

My point of order is not aimed at embarrassing the Acting Leader in the Senate. Surely he will understand as well as I do that as a senator who is not a Cabinet member and has no ministerial responsibilities, he must be careful. As much as I know him, he will not take it upon himself to make decisions involving the Cabinet, because he is not a member of the Cabinet and does not have access to the kind of information which is available to Senator Austin, who sits across the aisle from me.

If the Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate tells us: Well I will take your questions as notice, I will get the