

Oral Questions

investigation of the \$12-billion oil company rip-offs alleged by the Bertrand report. Can the minister confirm to the House that a secret meeting was held on July 7 behind the backs of the majority of the intervenors, who total 40 in number, at which only the oil companies were asked for their input?

[*Translation*]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, it was not a secret meeting, but rather a first meeting between the lawyers of the Unfair Trade Practices Commission, the lawyers of the government in this case, and the lawyers of the accused, namely, the oil companies. This was a working meeting in preparation for the hearings to be held in the near future. The first public meeting to which will be invited the lawyers of third parties, that is the various associations wishing to express their views, will be held at the end of this month. This first meeting was therefore not exclusive, but simply a first meeting between the lawyers of the main parties involved in this case, and there will be other meetings to which third parties may be called and heard.

● (1440)

[*English*]

MINISTER'S POSITION ON PROCEDURE FOLLOWED

Mr. Ian Waddell (Vancouver-Kingsway): I have before me the memo from the counsel, Mr. McDonald counsel for the commission, listing that meeting with Gulf, Imperial, Shell, Texaco, BP, Chevron, Irving, Petrofina and Suncor. The minister says that that was an encounter. It seems to me that it was a strange encounter.

Do I take it, then, that the minister approves of this procedure whereby commission counsel meets? This was not a public meeting. The other intervenors could not come. There were only the oil companies. It was a meeting behind closed doors with the very companies which are being investigated. Does the minister approve that kind of procedure? Does he think that that will lead to what would appear to be a fair hearing?

[*Translation*]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, I am surprised at the reaction of the hon. member. It is quite normal in court proceedings for the lawyers of both parties involved, that is the Crown and the defence counsel, to meet in camera before the judge. This occurs frequently and there is nothing incompatible or wrong in this as long as both parties appear together before the judge.

In fact I can assure the hon. member that no final decision concerning the procedure to be followed during the public hearings will be made before the meeting at the end of this month where not only the Crown and the defence counsel but also third parties wishing to express their views will have the opportunity to do so.

[*English*]

PORTS

DELAY IN SIGNING CONTRACT FOR WORKS AT PRINCE RUPERT, B.C.

Mr. Bill McKnight (Kindersley-Lloydminster): I would like to address my question to the Minister of Transport, through Your Honour. I provided advance notice to him last week. Can the minister tell us whether the proposed delay will be two months in the awarding of the contracts for access, site preparation, etc., for Prince Rupert? Will the delay to the contract which was closed on July 7 be two months, or will work start sooner, before the rains and the wet season hit the port of Prince Rupert?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Hon. members will remember that some months ago there was a discussion between the grain consortium and the National Harbours Board having to do with the ground at Prince Rupert, the famous "caisson" business. At that time the National Harbours Board decided to allow for a certain change in the site to be used for the grain terminal. That caused a two-month delay, which explains why we are now two months behind. The National Harbours Board has 60 days to make a decision on the site preparation contract, and that should be by September. But it is hoped that less time will be needed. Be that as it may, the time for delivery of the site to the consortium, is May, 1982, and that will be done.

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CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

QUERY RESPECTING INITIAL WHEAT PRICES FOR NEW CROP YEAR

Mr. Bill McKnight (Kindersley-Lloydminster): Madam Speaker, I certainly cannot understand the delay of 60 days in the awarding of a contract, but I would like to ask the minister a supplementary question at this time. Would he be prepared either to confirm or deny, or to announce to the House, that the price for spring wheat and durum wheat will be much lower, approximately \$4.75 a bushel, in the coming crop year? As Your Honour recalls, and I am sure that the minister does, the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board had said that he would make an announcement in July, which is certainly about three months late. I think we would like to have an announcement now, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): I am not in a position to do that, Madam Speaker, but the minister of state for the Canadian Wheat Board still has a number of days to go, and still live within the promise he made, which is to make the announcement before the opening of the new crop year.