

Oral Questions

safety of Canadians in Libya, there is still no evidence of any threat. To say otherwise would be to raise undue alarm. I think the moderate response of the Prime Minister last Friday is the proper message to be conveyed to Canadians in Libya. Of course there are always alternatives, and again the Prime Minister pointed that out in his statement of last January 10 as he did last Friday and also today.

● (1430)

FREEDOM OF CANADIANS TO LEAVE LIBYA

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—Port au Port—St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister. The Deputy Prime Minister has assured the House twice in the last few minutes that there is no reason to believe anything other than that Canadians are safe in Libya. We welcome that assurance. Why then is the Minister reluctant to assure the House that, indeed, Canadians are free to leave Libya at will and that, indeed, the Government of Canada has secured from the Libyans the ability for Canada to fly planes into that country and to take our people home?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): The hon. gentleman distorts what I said. I said that there is no evidence of any threat to Canadian citizens in Libya. That is not inconsistent at all with the statement of the Prime Minister on January 10 and again last Friday, urging Canadians in the circumstance to re-examine their own safety and act accordingly. Again, with respect to contingency plans, surely the hon. gentleman realizes that to discuss any details of any such plans would prejudice the very plans themselves.

POSSIBLE EVACUATION OF CANADIANS

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—Port au Port—St. Barbe): There is an inherent inconsistency in the Deputy Prime Minister's answer. Given there is no reason to fear for the safety of Canadians according to the Deputy Prime Minister, and given that the Deputy Prime Minister says they can come home at will, has the Deputy Prime Minister assured himself, by discussing directly with representatives of the Government of Libya, that Canada is able, if Canada desires, to fly into that country with aircraft and to bring home those of our people who want to come home, directly and safely?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): The answer to that, Sir, is at this moment there is no reason to anticipate that we would not be able to do that. If the hon. gentleman has difficulty in understanding what was said let me refresh his memory with a direct quote from the Prime Minister of last week:

We would recommend those Canadians in Libya that they might want to reassess their position very carefully and determine whether they have grounds for additional anxieties about their security.

The ordinary methods of travel are still providing ingress and egress from the commercial airports in Libya, and

Canadians can come to their own conclusions with respect to their own personal circumstances.

REPORTED STRIKE BY LIBYA AGAINST UNITED STATES COMMUNICATIONS BASE

Mr. Derek Blackburn (Brant): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister. Does the Deputy Prime Minister have any concrete information that there was a follow-on strike by Libya against U.S. installations somewhere in the Mediterranean, a communications base south of Sicily?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): The Government has had reports, Sir, as yet unconfirmed in a hard way, that a small island some 60 kilometres south of Malta, Lampedusa, and an American telecommunications establishment on that island, were attacked. The unconfirmed reports from the Italian Government are that there were no casualties and the attack was of a minor nature.

POSSIBILITY OF RETALIATION FOLLOWING UNITED STATES ACTION

Mr. Derek Blackburn (Brant): Based on the Deputy Prime Minister's answer, would he not agree then that the use of force by the United States is possibly leading to retaliation, forceful military retaliation, which is the very thing that President Reagan wishes to avoid and wishes to bring to an end in that part of the world?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): I do not make the assumption that the initial reports with respect to Lampedusa are confirmed, which the hon. gentleman may mistakenly have been doing. Let me say that the Government has made it clear many times in the past that terrorism, as the Prime Minister said in his statement today, is reprehensible and evil, an evil which all members of the international community must work to eliminate. The United States was seeking to do precisely that, and Canada supports that objective.

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PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

PATENT LAW AMENDMENTS—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Douglas C. Frith (Sudbury): My question is directed to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Has the Government decided to delay tabling changes to the pharmaceutical patent Act because senior Ministers in the Mulroney Government have finally come to the conclusion that its approach to free trade negotiations with the United States on an item by item basis has seriously damaged Canada's bargain position?