

Oral Questions

● (1440)

Be that as it may, I repeat that there will be an extensive process of consultation between representatives of the groups who were at the Gilson exercise and their members in the weeks ahead. I and other members of the cabinet will meet with a good number of these associations. The process of consultation will be really exhaustive by the time we come to debate the bill in the fall. Then there will be parliamentary views expressed on this bill, and if my hon. friend wants to bring other people to committee to discuss the issue, he will have a chance to do that.

I have been involved in this issue for a couple of years now, and almost everywhere I went in the west people would say, "We have discussed this problem now for decades; it is time to act". My hon. friend would like to go back to the past; I suggest he come forward to the present and into the future.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

REQUEST THAT REPORT BE REFERRED TO PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Madam Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Minister of Transport. Why is the minister circumventing the parliamentary process at this particular time? We have the Gilson report tabled, and it is very complex with many areas which require clarification. Would the minister not consider referring the report to a standing committee where he, and indeed Dr. Gilson, would avail themselves to clarify some of the very important recommendations made in this report so that Members of Parliament would have a clear understanding of its recommendations before legislation is brought before the House?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, those representatives who were at the Gilson exercise, as I call it, suggested that now they have the report they should go back to their different memberships and discuss the conclusions reached by the federal representative. They are the ones who want to take it up with their members. Again I say that after the federal government has made its decision on this issue, we will have plenty of time in the fall to debate everything in the Gilson report.

Mr. Clark: Just like VIA Rail.

Mr. Pepin: I do not know what will be retained by cabinet from the Gilson report, but I am quite willing to say today that it is a tremendous effort and generally well received.

Mr. Benjamin: By whom?

Mr. Pepin: Well received by people who looked at it this morning. But I will immediately add that it was almost impossible to read what was on the faces of those representatives yesterday or last night because, before expressing their own personal views on the Gilson report, they want to go back and discuss it with members of their associations, which I think is a hell of a good democratic process.

ROLE OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Madam Speaker, surely the minister should and does realize that he has a responsibility to the members of this House who are elected to serve the interests of their constituents. Fortunately the bulk of those members are situated on this side of the House, but the minister insists on not allowing those members the opportunity of participating in this debate.

Will the minister, before the adjournment of the House, consider referring this report to the standing committee so that members can question the minister and Dr. Gilson to clarify further the recommendations? And since the minister is sold on the report and the consultations, are we to assume that he accepts the recommendations? If not, are there any areas with which the minister does disagree?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, in my understanding of the parliamentary process the role of the opposition is not to comment, favourably or unfavourably, on investigations or reports asked for on our way to legislation. The role of the opposition is to comment, favourably or unfavourably, on propositions that the government intends to put into law.

Mr. Clark: Why did you set up the task forces?

Mr. Pepin: That is what the opposition will have a chance to do in the fall. If every report were brought to the House and to committee for discussion, I suggest there would be no end to it.

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MARINE TRANSPORT

HAZARDS TO NAVIGATION

Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Dartmouth-Halifax East): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport. I should say to him that the Gilson report, as well as the subject matter which concerns me, is perhaps a little more important to more Canadians than is the ports bill.

In light of incidents, both here, in the U.S., and in certain parts of Europe, involving either direct collisions with bridges carrying vehicular or pedestrian traffic, or near collisions, including Halifax harbour and the St. Lawrence River, I ask the minister whether or not these incidents raise once again in the minister's mind not only the legal obligations which might obtain but also the moral obligation to extend some form of bridge piling structure fendering so as to protect lives in the event of an accidental collision.

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, under the Navigable Waters Protection Act the Government of Canada authorizes the construction of bridges over certain waters, and it has responsibility for maintaining traffic in those waters. When it comes to bridges such as the two in Halifax which my hon. friend has in mind, those are