

Oral Questions

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman can rest assured that there will be no plutonium flights over Canadian territory unless the Canadian Government gives its consent to such flights.

The U.S. can sign an agreement with Japan and Japan can sign an agreement with the U.S. They can sign an agreement together, and they can sign it with 10 other countries or 100 other countries.

There will be no overflights over Canada with respect to carrying plutonium unless the Government of Canada finds that it is safe, that it is in order to do so, and gives its consent, of that the Hon. Member may be assured.

As to consultation, yes, there has been consultation. The United States knows that Canada has the right to restrict or refuse overflights of plutonium which, by the way, are at least several years hence because there is nothing contemplated in the near future in any event.

CONSULTATION WITH UNITED STATES

Mr. Howard McCurdy (Windsor—Walkerville): Mr. Speaker, perhaps we should wait until the very last minute.

The Minister of Transport says that we have been consulted. Does that consultation, I repeat, include the details of the agreement? When the Minister of Transport says that we must be assured of safety, does that mean containers will be used that will withstand not a 400 kilometre per hour impact, but the 700 kilometre per hour impact that is likely? Does it include the preparation of landing strips in the North and the necessary facilities for handling crashes in the North if that should happen?

Are these the criteria that will be applied in adjudicating whether Canadians will accept the overflight of plutonium over Canada?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Members love crying "wolf" on the other side of the House. "Wolf" is constantly being cried in this issue.

Japan and the United States signed a nuclear co-operation agreement on November 4. No proposal has been made that they fly plutonium under that agreement over Canadian territory. They agree that if they are going to make any such proposal in the future Canada will be consulted and will have the right to review the proposal.

It is agreed that we have the right to restrict or refuse any overflights across Canadian territory. That is agreed to by both Japan, the United States, and by all other international bodies involved. If there were any such proposal there would have to be a transportation plan, and an appropriate pass for transporting the plutonium must be developed. Those activities could take a number of years.

We are just as concerned about any possible accident with plutonium as is the Hon. Member. There has been no such

proposal. If there ever is such a proposal, we will determine whether or not it is safe, whether or not it is in the interests of Canada for such overflights to be permitted, and it is recognized by all concerned that we have the right to decide that.

REQUEST THAT CANADA REFUSE PERMISSION FOR OVERFLIGHTS

Mr. Howard McCurdy (Windsor—Walkerville): Mr. Speaker, for the Minister to say that we are calling "wolf" is not only silly but irresponsible. We are talking about the potential overflight of what could be termed plutonium dustbombs which would by wind, if a crash were to occur, lead to the contamination of the entire northern environment and serious health effects would last for many, many years indeed. Rather than lodging a notice that maybe we will, maybe we will not approve such overflights, rather than conjuring up notions of crying "wolf", is it not time to simply say no, we will not subject the North to that kind of hazard?

• (1430)

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, isn't life simple when you are in the Opposition? You simply tear up agreements, you simply say no and that is all you do. You do not recognize the fact that there are international Conventions to which Canada is a party which require certain courses of action to be taken.

If you are in the Opposition, you will not listen to the fact that there has been no proposal for any such overflights. You will not listen to the fact that the United States and Japan have agreed that we must be consulted and consent, and you apparently do not want to listen to the fact that there has to be a transportation plan and a safe cask in which to move that material for it even to be considered.

We will not say an anticipatory no when we have never been asked to say yes or no. It would be ridiculous and contrary to our international obligations to do so.

Mr. Riis: The people of Canada are asking.

Mr. Crosbie: Anticipatory hysteria.

* * *

HOUSE OF COMMONS

PRESENCE IN GALLERY OF FORMER SPEAKER,
RIGHT HON. ROLAND MICHENER

Mr. Speaker: I wish to bring to Hon. Members' attention the presence in the gallery of a former colleague who served our country with distinction as a Member of Parliament, Speaker of the House of Commons, High Commissioner, and Governor General, the Right Hon. Roland Michener.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!