

Oral Questions

refusing to indicate to the House whether in fact there is any substance to his statement?

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member can make what assertions he likes, but I would point out to him again, and to the House, that the express purpose of the technical advisory committee on petroleum supply and demand is to provide that kind of liaison between agencies of government and the industry for the purpose of determining what the supply and demand situation is at the present time, and will be through this coming winter, with regard to petroleum. On that basis my officials have been meeting regularly with representatives of the companies. This is the vehicle in the first place for keeping in touch with the supply situation as it may be now and as it may be in the future, specifically the vehicle for the information we receive from the industry at a time when we wanted to determine the greatest possible exposure for Canadians in the winter to come to determine what the possible risk was—

● (1420)

An hon. Member: Why don't you answer the question?

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): —and that is the figure I gave to the House. I am sure the hon. member would be the first member of the House to take exception if we had not made it clear what we thought the exposure was and at a later date it turned out to be much greater than anticipated.

Mr. Stanfield: After all his delays and his refusal to give the House information may I ask the minister whether, even at this date, he will make inquiries to ascertain what substance in fact there is to this allegation that supplying companies from non-Arab sources have indicated an intention to resort to a *force majeure* clause, and what this amounts to in fact in terms of barrels of oil per day? Will the minister now undertake these inquiries and give this information to the House?

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, I will undertake that we will continue to use the technical committee for the purpose of keeping in touch with the industry, and this, on any sensible basis, is the way to handle it, by continuing liaison with the industry.

Mr. David Lewis (York South): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question. On this saga of the *force majeure* clause may I put the following question to the minister, and perhaps we can get a simple and straightforward answer.

An hon. Member: I doubt it.

An hon. Member: Oh, no!

Mr. Bell: It will be simple.

Mr. Lewis: Do his answers amount to this, Mr. Speaker, that he had no indication of any intention from any source to use the *force majeure* clause, that his attention was brought to the fact that such a clause existed in the contracts between Canadian companies and supplying companies and if it were invoked the result he indicated would be the result to come? Is that the kind of hypotheti-

[Mr. Stanfield.]

cal position that he found it necessary to frighten the Canadian people with?

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, we sought to find out from the industry the kind of risk for the balance of this winter that Canadians could be exposed to. It was for that purpose that we made inquiries, and we received an indication that with a continuation of the deterioration of the international supply situation this interruption could take place, and on the basis of this interruption we made a calculation of what the drop in supply would be. That is the simple, straightforward situation.

Mr. Lewis: Do I also understand from the minister's answers over the days that this so-called information came to him through the industry members on the advisory committee? If so, has he gone back to those industry members since these questions have been asked beginning on Monday to inquire whether they have any harder information than the information on which he has spoken before or is the situation the same, that there is no actual intention expressed by any company to cut back?

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, all indications are that there is no actual intention, certainly not as expressed by the companies.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): We are indeed keeping in continuing liaison through the committee, and this seems to be the most sensible administrative way to keep in touch with the industry on a continuing basis.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Chair will recognize the hon. member for York South for a last supplementary at this point, followed by the hon. member for Témiscamingue.

Mr. Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everyone will approve of the minister keeping in touch with the situation but a lot of us would not approve of frightening the Canadian people if it is not necessary to do so.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, will the minister now undertake to the House that he will report on a regular basis on whether or not any direct intention has been expressed by any supplying company and the extent to which that might affect the supply of oil, and who these companies are, so that the Canadian people and members of the House can be informed on a regular, daily basis as to whether or not the fear he has created is justified?

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman, I am sure, would want me to make perfectly clear to Canadians the kind of risk we face. If the hon. gentleman will not accuse me of frightening Canadians each time a fresh development occurs of trying to create fear, I will do my best to keep him informed.