

SUGGESTION PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE INVESTIGATE USE OF AGENTS IN SALE OF CANDU REACTORS

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Acting Prime Minister. I will not pursue the question of asking for a Royal commission inquiry because this government has shown its sensitivity about Royal commission inquiries into its alleged misdeeds. Is the government prepared to ask this House to give the public accounts committee full authority to pursue an investigation with unrestricted powers to compel the attendance of witnesses and the production of documents if necessary by warrant, without any interference by use of the Crown executive privilege and to engage investigators and to have this investigation carried on outside Canada if necessary so that the unfortunate taxpayers of this country may get some protection?

● (1440)

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I cannot comment in detail on each of the apparently unprecedented powers sought by the hon. gentleman.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): The situation is without precedent.

Mr. MacEachen: However, when the public accounts committee was established, the government undertook to facilitate its work in every possible way. If the public accounts committee itself decides it needs further powers, identifies what they are and how they are to be exercised, of course the government would consider the matter, but the public accounts committee itself knows what action to take if it has reached that conclusion.

RESPONSIBILITY OF GOVERNMENT TO SEEK INFORMATION ON PAYMENT OF AGENTS' FEES IN SALE OF CANDU REACTORS

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Halifax): Mr. Speaker, may I ask the Acting Prime Minister if he does not believe that the government has some responsibility to satisfy itself where all this money went and what practices were involved? Does it feel it can slough off this responsibility simply by making a reference to the public accounts committee, or does the Acting Prime Minister believe that we think he and his colleagues are so stupid that they could not get this information if they wanted to get it?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the reference to the public accounts committee arose from a demand in the House of Commons, since it was suggested that this would be the appropriate way to establish the facts. In response to an opposition demand, and not in an effort to slough off its own responsibilities, the government agreed to make this particular reference. That is the history of the matter.

Mr. Stanfield: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Since the government is ultimately responsible not to parliament but to the people of Canada, does the Acting Prime

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Minister believe the government has no responsibility to find out and satisfy itself where this money went? Does the government believe it has discharged its responsibility and expect anybody to believe it has so discharged its responsibility to date?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, the government, obviously, has attempted to discharge its responsibilities. Ministers have appeared before the committee in order to give full information. We are still ready to consider how to facilitate the work of the committee. The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and the Secretary of State for External Affairs have both been extremely forthcoming in providing information on these matters.

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INDIAN AFFAIRS

MERCURY POLLUTION OF ENGLISH-WABIGOON RIVER SYSTEM—INQUIRY WHETHER ONTARIO REQUESTED CLOSURE

Mr. Cyril Symes (Sault Ste. Marie): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and concerns mercury pollution in the English-Wabigoon river system which is threatening the health of the native people in the area. In view of an Ontario government task force report in 1973 which recommended that the river system should be closed to all fishing, and in view of the federal government's power to close the river system at the request of the province, has the Ontario government at any time asked the federal government to close this river system to all fishing?

Hon. Warren Allmand (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Not to my knowledge, Mr. Speaker.

MERCURY POLLUTION OF ENGLISH-WABIGOON RIVER SYSTEM—FEDERAL REQUEST THAT ONTARIO CLOSE TO FISHING

Mr. Cyril Symes (Sault Ste. Marie): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Has the federal government, in its consultations with the Ontario government, urged Ontario to take the necessary steps to ban sports fishing in the English-Wabigoon river systems so that the people in the area will be protected from mercury poisoning? Also, what reasons has the Ontario government given for not complying with the federal government's request?

Hon. Warren Allmand (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, I personally met with three Ontario ministers and urged on them the closing of the river. I also proposed a meeting with them in order to develop an economic development package for the people of the area. So far, Ontario has not made a positive response.

Mr. Broadbent: When was the meeting?

Mr. Allmand: The meeting was prior to the new year, either in November or December.