

Oral Questions

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

THE MINISTRY

POSSIBLE RESIGNATION OF MINISTER OF TRANSPORT IN VIEW OF CONFLICTING VIEWS ON AGREEMENT WITH AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS

Mr. Claude Wagner (Saint-Hyacinthe): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister.

In view of the comments made during the weekend by the Minister of Communications accusing the government, and I quote:

"of falling on its knees before a bunch of fanatics"

...for having signed an agreement with CALPA and CATCA and also owing to the surprise publicly expressed by the Prime Minister on his return from Puerto Rico about the clause of the agreement promising a free vote in Parliament on the basic issue of bilingualism in the air-ground communications in Quebec, which is a barely veiled denunciation of the conduct of the Minister of Transport, is it to maintain, as he said himself, the cohesion of power that the Prime Minister has asked or intends to ask for the resignation of both the Minister of Communications and the Minister of Transport?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): No, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Wagner: Mr. Speaker, I want to ask a supplementary question.

To follow up on his answer, could the Prime Minister tell the House whether he will thus allow his ministers to denounce the decisions of the cabinet of which they are members? In addition, could he expose to the House his own idea of ministerial solidarity?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member wants me to give him a lecture on political theory one day, I am at his disposal.

POSSIBLE RESIGNATION OF MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS IN VIEW OF CONFLICTING VIEWS ON AGREEMENT WITH AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS

Mr. Claude Wagner (Saint-Hyacinthe): Mr. Speaker, I should like to put a supplementary. I would not have thought the Prime Minister would have taken so easy a sidetrack.

I therefore put my question to the Minister of Communications and ask her whether, in the light of the well known principles of ministerial solidarity the Prime Minister chooses to ignore today, she persists in accusing the government of having knelt before a bunch of fanatics? If so, does she intend to resign, thus imitating the courageous gesture of the hon. member for Langelier?

Hon. Jeanne Sauvé (Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, several of us feel that the agreement is bad, but still the best possible we could conclude under the circumstances.

[Mr. Speaker.]

I said in my statement that we could not denounce collectively what one of our colleagues, in the normal exercise of his duties, had felt he should accept and that, consequently, we are of the opinion, with regard to that agreement, whatever we feel as far as solidarity with our colleague is concerned, that the agreement is not satisfactory in every way. We have to live with an agreement that is not perfect. We remain united behind our colleague who supported the agreement, but I still feel that, faced with a bunch of fanatics, we were forced to accept an agreement that will be difficult to live with, but which in no way calls in question again the policy of bilingualism within the federal government.

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[English]

AIR TRANSPORT

REQUEST FOR CLARIFICATION OF MINISTER'S LETTER TO QUEBEC AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS

Mr. Donald W. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Mr. Speaker, I think this is an area where calm is required and less inflammation.

Some hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): I should like to direct a question to the Minister of Transport because he, too, has injected an element of confusion into this. In his letter to Les Gens de l'Air he mentions it is only a matter for the commission to "explain why they should disregard" the arguments of CATCA and CALPA. Could the minister explain what he means by taking this anodyne approach especially when in the signed agreement with CATCA and CALPA it is a matter of "justifying beyond a reasonable doubt" why any contrary view expressed by those two organizations should not prevail? To most readers, the words "explain" and "justify beyond reasonable doubt" do not convey the same meaning.

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, the words used in my letter stand by themselves in terms of explaining how I view the contents of the agreement and, I think, how they are viewed by other participants. If one looks at the practical situation which will face the commission one can have a view of what in fact will be before them which allows those words to be understood. As a practical matter, the time the commission will be asked to judge as to the procedures and their safety is when, at the end of the difficult simulation work, a set of procedures has been devised and Transport Canada is prepared to certify those procedures as safe and ready for implementation. At that point the issue arises as to the judgment of the commission. The agreement deals with the potential argument which may exist then, and this is obviously hypothetical, by the two organizations which would disagree with the view being taken by Transport Canada. I think if members would look either at the letter or the agreement they will see that what is to be expected is a clear and forthright statement which impresses a reader of its import as to why the commission was able to certify safety notwithstanding different arguments. That could be put in one or two different ways. I have now put