

Oral Questions

Mr. Epp: From the answer the minister has just given, I do not believe he has checked into the matter as he promised he would. A memorandum we have received indicates that the Deputy Minister of Employment and Immigration feels these overpayments should be pursued, yet officials in Treasury Board feel these are not debts due to the Crown because the contracts are not legally binding.

Would the minister check into this, because there is a strong debate going on as to whether these contracts are legally binding or not? It is his own department which is now questioning whether these overpayments can be recovered. He is the protector of the taxpayers' money, so what is he doing about it?

Mr. Buchanan: As I have said, the policy is quite clear. If these are legal obligations, the matter will be legally pursued and we shall endeavour to collect the amounts due. If there is a dispute as to the legal status of these obligations, that is something upon which we seek the opinion of the Department of Justice. But, I repeat, if they are legal obligations it is our intent to pursue them.

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SHIPPING

REGULATIONS RESPECTING SAFE OPERATION OF SMALL BOATS

Mr. Rob Parker (Eglinton): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Transport. His ministry has put into effect new regulations for the safe operation of small boats in Canada which, among other things, require every boat over 5.5 metres in length to carry at least six approved flares.

In view of the fact that the minister is demanding a minimum expenditure of \$50 with respect to every boat of this size or more, can he resolve the conflict between the statement in the Boating Safety Guide, which contains the regulations, that "the red flares used on railroads are efficient and inexpensive", and the statement made in a letter from one of his officials to the Ontario Marina Operators' Association that "road flares and rail flares . . . are totally unsuitable, inadequate and, in fact, frequently hazardous in a marine environment".

Can the minister reconcile these conflicting statements, bearing in mind the large number of boat owners involved and the short period remaining before the boating season opens?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Transport): It is the latter statement which really reflects the judgment of today. Flares which are not waterproof or weatherproof are not adequate for boating situations; they might be unusable, and unless they are safe in an operational sense they might cause additional problems to boat owners in distress. That is the basis for our intervention.

Having required the presence of these flares, it seemed important to us that they should be safe and that they would operate when required without adding to the hazard. Hence, we have introduced specific regulations.

[Mr. Buchanan.]

Mr. Parker: I accept the minister's explanation, of course, but I should like to ask him what steps he is taking to explain to everyone in Canada who reads his department's Boating Safety Guide why it should contain a statement saying exactly the opposite of what he is telling the House.

One further supplementary: In view of the fact that stocks of these flares seem to be in short supply in Canada, would the hon. gentleman issue a go-slow order to law enforcement officers so that boat owners might have a chance to equip themselves with approved flares?

Mr. Lang: I understand there has been some discussion about enforcement of the regulations when there is any real problem about obtaining the flares. Enforcement will be arranged progressively rather than in a manner unfair to boat owners.

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EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

REPRESENTATIONS RESPECTING PLIGHT OF ANATOLY SHCHARANSKY

Mr. Donald J. Johnston (Westmount): Mr. Speaker, would the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that representations have recently been made on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Shcharansky with respect to the plight of Mrs. Shcharansky's husband, Anatoly Shcharansky? I understand such representations have been made recently to the Prime Minister. Have representations, in fact, been made, and what is or will be the response of the Canadian government with respect to them?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council): I understand the solicitor for Mrs. Shcharansky in Canada has made certain representations, or made certain views known, to the Prime Minister and that the Prime Minister replied to Mrs. Shcharansky as of March 19 in particular deploring the treatment of her husband and expressing the hope that the Soviet Union would take action soon to release him to come to Canada. Also, the Prime Minister reiterated that the offer made earlier to receive Mr. Shcharansky is still open.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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ENERGY

REPORTED DIVERSION TO UNITED STATES OF OIL DESTINED FOR CANADA

Mr. Cyril Symes (Sault Ste. Marie): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. In view of somewhat disturbing reports in the press recently that Congressman Albert Gore of the United States has charged that early in February Exxon diverted several tankers intended for Imperial Oil's Canadian market to a New England group of buyers, for a substantial profit, has the minister