

ENERGY

SYNCRUDE PROJECT—SUGGESTED LETTER OF INTENT FROM
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. James Gillies (Don Valley): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the government House leader. Will the hon. gentleman and his colleagues, within the next few days, provide a letter of intent to the private companies involved in Syncrude assuring them that the federal government will take a position in connection with that project?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (President of the Privy Council): Discussions are going on now; I understand there is some sort of deadline by Friday of this week. I cannot undertake that our final decision will be taken by then, but certainly a statement will be made.

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PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

SUGGESTED COMMITTEE REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES AND
APPEARANCE OF SENIOR OFFICIALS BEFORE COMMITTEES

Mr. Joe Clark (Rocky Mountain): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Acting Prime Minister. It relates to the new practice in the Prime Minister's office—the setting up of an informal council of economic advisors to countervail the advice of the Minister of Finance. Will the Acting Prime Minister agree to make an immediate reference which would allow a committee of parliament to review the activities of the Prime Minister's office and of the Privy Council office which constitute, in effect, a government within a government, one which is not answerable, apparently, either to parliament or to the cabinet?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Prime Minister, I do not accept the premise of the question. I have been in government for 12 years and I always think it is very useful to get advice from all sides, outside as well as inside, government. I hope this government will continue to do so.

Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain): I apologize to the Acting Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, for so disconcerting him that he has awarded you a position you do not at least yet hold. I wonder whether the Acting Prime Minister would at least give an undertaking to the House now that senior officials of the Privy Council office and of the Prime Minister's office will be required by the Prime Minister to begin to appear before standing committees so that those officials will be responsible to this parliament in the way that regular public servants are?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, I doubt even more seriously the premises of that question. It is we on this side of the House who are responsible to parliament, not our civil servants.

SUGGESTED APPEARANCE OF PRIME MINISTER BEFORE
COMMITTEES

Mr. Joe Clark (Rocky Mountain): Then, would the Acting Prime Minister now give us an undertaking that

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the Prime Minister will abandon his past practice and himself begin to appear before the standing committees of this House so that he, as the minister responsible for the Privy Council office and the Prime Minister's office, will be answerable to the standing committees, as are other ministers answerable for the public servants who work under their direction and who are responsible through them to this House?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I do not think that our Prime Minister would ever be reluctant to appear anywhere. I do think, however, that it is more important that he should be here in the House answering questions than that he should appear before standing committees. I do not think he is personally opposed, but I would caution him, in the interests of conserving his energy for equally important things, that he should not as a general rule attend standing committees.

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CRIMINAL CODE

PROPOSED AMENDMENT OF PROVISIONS RELATING TO
FIREARMS

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I want to direct a question on matters of national importance to the Solicitor General, whose responsibility extends to the RCMP. I want to ask him whether it is not a fact that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police are very deeply concerned over the multitude of gun-toting criminals who in recent months have committed murders, hold-ups and the like with firearms. Would he, in order to meet this serious tidal wave of crime, consider bringing section 83 of the Criminal Code before the House, the section that provides for a penalty for anyone carrying a firearm with intent, and make that penalty a minimum of five years so that it will be a deterrent to these thugs who today are terrorizing all parts of Canada?

Hon. Warren Allmand (Solicitor General): Yes, Mr. Speaker, it is true that the RCMP are concerned about these matters. As the right hon. member knows, I personally have been concerned about our gun law for several years now. I should point out that we have in the ministry at the present time a working group studying the adequacy of our gun laws, and I will refer that suggestion to that particular group and take it under consideration myself. I should point out, however, that any change in the substance of our criminal law is in the hands of our Minister of Justice, the Attorney General.

Mr. Diefenbaker: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I addressed the question, of course, to the minister because I knew we would get some action from him. The minister mentioned the gun law amendments. He will know that most of those amendments are strongly objected to by law-abiding Canadians, particularly by the Canadian Federation of Wildlife which has 250,000 Canadians as members and who would find themselves in an impossible position if these amendments were brought into effect. Taking the course that I suggest now, would the minister not consider that a deterrent to these people