

Oral Questions

table in the House on a periodic basis the requests which have been made for off-the-record briefings with senior officials so that we will know exactly what exceptional circumstances apply?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to give my hon. friend the assurance of reasonable and thoughtful application of guidelines which are only designed to be of assistance in making the truth available to the Canadian public. Inasmuch as he referred to distinguished members of the Press Gallery, I point out to him that we received a letter from the President of the Press Gallery who was inviting Members of Parliament to join the Press Club. It says: "The Club is an ideal place for parliamentarians to relax and make contact with members of the media, particularly in view of the fact that the premises are strictly off the record".

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

ANSWERS GIVEN BY DEPARTMENTAL OFFICIALS

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, my question is also directed to the Prime Minister. Like all Members of Parliament we were pleased with his announcement that this would be an open Government. When we received an offer from the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs to be briefed by senior officials, we accepted that offer. We spent an hour and a half with senior officials of his Department yesterday. We went there asking for factual information on important issues such as the competition policy, metrication, and so on. After an hour and a half, not only could we not receive any useful answers about future policy, but we got no answers on facts. What was the point of the offer?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, may I say, with respect, to my hon. friend that it would be unlikely that any public servant would want to explore future policy with a member of the Opposition. It is the role of the Government to develop policy. Once that policy is developed, it is the role of the Public Service to explain it.

● (1430)

REQUESTS FOR FACTUAL INFORMATION

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the Prime Minister understood the question I was asking. I understood that we would not get future policy advice. We were asking for factual information, whether there were new updates on competition policy and so on. Nothing came forward. We wondered if the reason we could not get any information was because the legislative secretary to the Minister was there taking notes and the public servants would not answer. They were afraid that the guidelines would get them in trouble.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, there is certainly nothing in the guidelines that would

inhibit the kind of legitimate information to which my Hon. friend seeks access. With regard to the reluctance of public servants and others, the answer may be that the normal course is for the Public Service to refine the ideas as indicated by the Cabinet, and bring them forward. Once Cabinet approves, they are introduced in the House as legislation.

* * *

ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY

DISRUPTION OF SHIPPING CAUSED BY DAMAGED LIFT BRIDGE

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber-Port au Port-St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport. It concerns the shutdown of the St. Lawrence Seaway system at Valleyfield, Quebec. The Minister is aware that as of this morning 85 ships are tied up waiting to enter the Seaway system, and that an additional 117 ships are inside the Seaway system waiting to get out. In light of the fact that the Valleyfield Bridge No. 10 will not be repaired until December 7, and that the Seaway officially closes on December 15,—December 20 at the latest—will the Minister inform this House what measures are being contemplated by the Government of Canada to avoid what appears to be the inevitable bankruptcies which will occur as a result of the tremendous losses that have already been experienced by the companies involved, and by those companies whose vessels will be frozen both inside and outside the Seaway system this winter?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I know that all Members are concerned about the unfortunate mishap which occurred at the Valleyfield Bridge. I want to assure the Hon. Members, and all Members, that everything possible is being done to restore the bridge to operation. There are some 100 vessels currently being affected. The men and equipment are on site, repair is on schedule and is to be completed by December 6. There are some very important incentives incorporated into the contract which could conceivably result in the work being completed before then. With respect to other contingencies, we have assured the shippers that an extension will, in all likelihood, be made to the Seaway Season, with adequate icebreaking and back up facilities being provided.

Mr. Tobin: I thank the Minister for his answer. Everyone in this House recognizes that the matter is being rectified as quickly as possible.

CONSEQUENCES FOR SHIPPING COMPANIES

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber-Port au Port-St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Ships will be caught in that system this year and tremendous losses will be incurred. We know that some companies will go bankrupt and that there is a limited liability by the Seaway. What measures are being contemplated by the Government to prevent bankruptcies and the loss of jobs throughout the length and breadth of the Seaway system?