

Oral Questions

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Madam Speaker, certainly I said what the hon. member quoted, and I still believe, indeed, that that was the wrong decision made by the government at the time.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: Without knowing anything about it.

IMPORTATION OF CRUDE OIL FROM MEXICO

Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Dartmouth-Halifax East): Madam Speaker, I have a further question for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources when he concludes his conversation with the socialists to the left.

In view of the upcoming agreement between Canada and Mexico with respect to the importation of crude from that country, can the minister shed some light on the situation with respect to the capacity of eastern refineries to handle that portion of imports which will fall into the category of heavy crude?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Madam Speaker, when an agreement is reached with Mexico, we will be in a position to comment on the details arising out of that agreement.

Miss MacDonald: It was all ready for signing in January.

Mr. Lalonde: At the present time, discussions are taking place with the Mexican authorities. No agreement has been signed yet, and I will not comment until we have that agreement.

Miss MacDonald: Oh, what happened?

Mr. Forrestall: Madam Speaker, I am left with the impression that the minister is not aware that there will be a mixture of heavy and light crudes and that we have no refining capacity whatsoever in Atlantic Canada for heavy crude. If that is their way to self-sufficiency, they are on the wrong track.

My supplementary question has two points to it. The former government had agreed in principle to extend required financial aid to the companies involved in the refining. I wonder if the government is prepared to indicate whether they would honour that commitment; and, second, whether or not in the negotiations with Mexico a firm understanding has been arrived at, or is being pursued, with respect to movement in Canadian ships of that imported crude.

Mr. Lalonde: Madam Speaker, I am very happy to see that the hon. member is aware of the nature of the refineries in Nova Scotia.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lalonde: As far as the agreement is concerned, again, and the consequences arising out of the agreement, we will comment once the agreement has been reached and signed.

Mr. Forrestall: I will be raising a question of privilege at twelve o'clock.

* * *

POST OFFICE

RURAL SATURDAY POST OFFICE SERVICE

Mr. Laverne Lewycky (Dauphin): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General. In view of the numerous requests that many rural members of Parliament have received for the retention of rural Saturday post office service, could the minister advise this House whether or not his government is intending to continue the policy of the previous Conservative government in closing down rural post offices on Saturdays?

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House that we will not go ahead with such reductions in services without first consulting the elected representatives of this Parliament as well as the representatives of local associations of postmasters and their assistants.

[English]

Mr. Lewycky: I have a supplementary question, Madam Speaker. Has the minister conducted, or does he intend to do so, any studies on the economic and social hardships that Saturday closing of rural post offices would present to rural communities?

[Translation]

Mr. Ouellet: Madam Speaker, such a study can certainly be carried out. As Postmaster General, I can right now assure the hon. member that my policy will not be to cut back this service on Saturdays and I do not think, either, that it is the intent of the present Liberal government.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

NEW F-18A FIGHTER AIRCRAFT—EFFECT OF INFLATION ON PRICE

Hon. Allan B. McKinnon (Victoria): Madam Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the Minister of National Defence, although the Minister of Supply and Services might wish to reply, concerning a contract which was signed yesterday.

Considering that the inflation rate has risen very sharply in the United States recently, and in the matter of the F-18A may have risen as much as 50 per cent in costs in two years, can either minister tell us how they can rationalize their decision being made based on an assumed inflation rate of 8 per cent?