

● (1440)

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the guidelines with regard to price increases of course have been set out at length before parliament and are incorporated in the regulations. They will depend directly upon the nature of the business dealings carried on by the firm. But in general with regard to the distribution business, they are related to the gross profit margin of those businesses. With regard to the hon. gentleman's complaint that his letter has not produced a letter, I wish to reflect on that. It seems to me the more important occupation for the Anti-Inflation Board should be in scrutinizing the price questions the hon. gentleman has raised rather than engaging in correspondence.

Mr. Saltsman: Mr. Speaker, I sort of anticipated that the minister might be assisting the AIB in its public relations job. I am not interested in the AIB sending out letters or making phone calls. The information I am interested in getting from the minister is whether the Anti-Inflation Board will follow through in some serious way with the complaints that are laid before it or whether it will get some lady or young man on the telephone with a nice voice saying: "Don't worry about it; everything is under control; you can trust us". That is all we have been getting up until now. In asking my question the purpose is not to increase the correspondence between the AIB and members of parliament but to get some documentary evidence of good faith on the part of the AIB that it is following through with suggestions placed before it and is handling them.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, I am confident that the board is following through, particularly with regard to particular patterns of price increases which indicate a practice in this regard. Indeed, there have been a great many investigations of this kind.

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PENITENTIARIES

REQUEST FOR ASSURANCE NEW BRUNSWICK NOT A HAVEN FOR INMATES WHO TAKE HOSTAGES

Mr. Mike Landers (Saint John-Lancaster): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Solicitor General. In view of what occurred at Laval Penitentiary after recent negotiations would the Solicitor General care to clarify a statement he made on February 23, 1976 in this House when he gave his assurance that the province of New Brunswick would not become a haven for those individuals who tend to hide behind hostages?

Hon. Warren Allmand (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat that commitment. As I said in answer to a later question, from time to time the penitentiary service breaks up cliques and gangs in a penitentiary and distributes them to other penitentiaries around the country but always at the same security classification; in other words, maximum security inmates go to maximum security penitentiaries. This will have to be done and will continue to be done in the future.

Oral Questions

LABOUR CONDITIONS

THREATENED STRIKE OF COAL MINERS—GOVERNMENT ACTION TO AVOID

Mr. Bob Brisco (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Labour. In view of the imminent shutdown of the entire coal industry in British Columbia and Alberta, and in view of the fact that their contract calls for only 4 per cent over the AIB guidelines, will the minister seek an early meeting with the management of the coal industry, the AIB and representatives of the United Steel Workers, ACTE, and the United Mines Workers in order to prevent this imminent shutdown of the industry in those provinces.

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, if that is a representation on the part of the hon. member, certainly if the employers or the unions in question want to approach the Department of Labour or myself so that we might become familiar with their concerns and make any useful suggestions, we have been and will be very ready to do so particularly in the instance to which the hon. member is referring.

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ANTI-INFLATION PROGRAM

ALLEGATION COMINCO HIDING BEHIND GUIDELINES DURING NEGOTIATIONS—REQUEST FOR REPORT

Mr. Bob Brisco (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister of Labour for that responsible answer. Now, I shall turn to the Minister of Finance. I wonder whether he will come up with a similarly responsible answer. In view of the small percentage of 4 per cent over the AIB guidelines and in view of the fact that COMINCO will not negotiate for any amount over the AIB guidelines, will the minister examine the charge of labour that COMINCO in fact is hiding behind the guidelines and report his conclusions to the Anti-Inflation Board, to labour and to management as well as the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, Parliament has created the Anti-Inflation Board for the purpose of exercising scrutiny in particular cases and for carrying out the regulations that are provided which incorporate the guidelines. It seems to be a course of common sense for both management and labour everywhere in the country to obey the guidelines which have been set down by law. In particular, it is the role set out for the Anti-Inflation Board to apply those guidelines. Under the circumstances, the notion that I might examine and dictate a course of action to the AIB would seem clearly to be contrary to what Parliament has decreed the board should do.