

as serious as the wheat situation on the prairies. At a time when western Canada is in so serious a condition that in November retail sales in the province of Saskatchewan declined by \$15 million, over the year 1967, I ask the Prime Minister whether, having regard to the absence of all these ministers, he is not in a position to have one of his colleagues here who is qualified to answer in respect of the very important matter raised by my hon. friend from Mackenzie.

Mr. Trudeau: I have indicated that if the opposition parties would prefer us to rearrange this attendance list in a way which is more convenient, with some ministers present on certain days and others on other days, their absences alternated, we would be happy to do so.

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): The Prime Minister has indicated in his statement that the ministers are in their offices studying this matter. If he says they are working on this serious problem of damp grain and transportation, can he tell the house what they are proposing to do about it? What suggestions are they making in their offices? That is what we would like to hear.

Mr. Trudeau: If I had the answer to that, the ministers would not be in their offices studying the answers to these problems.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Trudeau: If the hon. member is trying to establish that the Prime Minister does not have the answers to all the questions asked, I am prepared to concede that; but on Thursday of last week there was occasion for a full debate on this subject.

Mr. Woolliams: The ministers have been studying this problem for six long weeks. How much more time will they need before coming up with any conclusion?

Mr. Thomas M. Bell (Saint John-Lancaster): A supplementary question for the Prime Minister. I should like to ask him where he gets the right as Prime Minister to deprive cabinet ministers of the privilege of attending sessions of the House of Commons as members of parliament.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question cannot be allowed.

Inquiries of the Ministry

[Translation]

PUBLIC WORKS

GASPÉ—REQUEST FOR REPAIR OF STORM DAMAGE

On the orders of the day:

Mr. Alexandre Cyr (Gaspé): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Public Works.

Is he aware that over the week-end a severe storm hit the coast of the Gaspé peninsula and that waves over 25 feet high caused the destruction of several federal government structures and damaged wharves and fishing coves? In addition, the railway lines have been torn away and trains are not operating any longer south of Gaspé. Would the minister tell the house whether his department will take immediate steps to rebuild or repair the numerous commercial wharves fishing coves and retaining walls which have been damaged by that tidal wave.

[English]

Hon. Arthur Laing (Minister of Public Works): Regrettably, we have received reports of very serious and widespread damage to marine structures in the Gaspé and the Magdalen islands. The Atlantic region engineers are at present making as rapid a survey as possible of the damage, and in all cases where commerce is impaired action will be taken with all speed.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

OVERTIME WORKED BY PERSONNEL IN CIVIL PAY SECTION

On the orders of the day:

Mr. Rod Thomson (Battleford-Kindersley): The question is to the Minister of National Defence. Why have personnel of the department in the civil pay section been working every evening, as well as Saturdays and Sundays, since December 2; and why have they not been paid overtime for this work?

Mr. Speaker: I suggest to the hon. member that if this question is one of immediate urgency it might be discussed at the time of adjournment this evening.

INSTRUCTIONS TO REPORT FOR WORK NOT IN UNIFORM

On the orders of the day:

Mr. Mark Rose (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, if I may I should like to direct this question to the Minister of National Defence.