

related to a report from Statistics Canada which came to me at about one o'clock. It reported that industrial corporate profits in general had risen by 39 per cent in the fourth quarter of last year. Will the minister now urge the corporations to rescind price increases which have led to profits of this type which can be described as usurious?

● (1450)

Mr. Allmand: I apologize to the hon. member, I thought he was referring to profits in the food industry. Sometimes it is difficult to hear in the House. I have not yet seen the report to which he referred. I would like to read it before making any statement on it.

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

REPORT OF OVERVIEW COMMITTEE—REASON FOR ABSENCE OF MINISTERS

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Deputy Prime Minister who in responses to questions by the hon. member for York-Simcoe and others has demonstrated his lack of knowledge with respect to the report and therefore demonstrated a lack of seriousness in the government's response to the report.

My question to him is this. In a matter as serious as this, dealing with the economics and future of this country and supposedly continuing the dialogue, as the government has put it, would the minister explain why the House of Commons, on the date when this document is released, is faced with the absence of nine economic ministers plus the Prime Minister? If there is a reason why those nine economic ministers are missing, I certainly would like to hear it and so would the country.

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I accept any criticism the hon. member might make about my lack of knowledge on this or any other subject, but I would point out to him that my responses were based on the report itself, unlike the questions that were asked by his colleagues which were based totally on the press release of the Canadian Labour Congress.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: I believe if the opposition had any knowledge of this subject, they might be able to develop independent questions instead of relying on what might be construed by some people as a not entirely non-partisan document.

The Prime Minister and nine economic ministers are in the city of Toronto today on public business—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. MacEachen: —meeting, today and tomorrow, with quite a large number of public interest groups. Of course, the President of the Board of Economic Ministers made this

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particular report public today, which I hope will be a matter of broad public discussion.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): The economic life of this country is extremely important and I would think the government would await the presence of these economic ministers in the House so they could be questioned on the day the report is released.

There is another matter, however. Has the government, in this report, conspired to mislead the people in this country with respect to the work of this government; and I deal with the whole question of the commodity tax revenue? The government in its response has implied, at page 25, that this committee has a reference to deal with the commodity tax review. In fact, we have tried to get the government to put in a reference, and they have said, "After the committee has finished its review." The government has attempted to imply that the commodity tax review is before parliament. That is not true.

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): When does the government intend to move on that review?

Mr. MacEachen: In reply to the hon. member, I would like to say that my reading of the report controverts entirely the implication which the hon. member has drawn.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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RAILWAYS

RESTORATION OF RAIL LINK BETWEEN NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN ONTARIO

Mr. B. Keith Penner (Thunder Bay): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Transport, but in his absence I will put it to his parliamentary secretary.

I should like to know whether the Minister of Transport is aware of the serious problem which has been created by the VIA Rail schedule for those people in northern Ontario who live along the CNR main line west of Capreol. Access by rail to Toronto, the political and commercial capital of the province, has become difficult and at times nearly impossible because of inadequate transfer arrangements. What action is the Minister of Transport able or willing to take to help restore an essential rail link between northern and southern Ontario?

Mr. Charles Lapointe (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, the minister has been made aware of the situation and has requested VIA Rail to look into it. VIA officials, I have been told, are studying the problem now and any change which would be requested would be referred to the CTC for approval.