

LABOUR CONDITIONS

DATE OF PUBLICATION OF HALL REPORT

Mr. Robert Muir (Cape Breton-The Sydneys): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Labour. Time and time again members of the opposition parties have posed questions regarding Dr. Noel Hall's report on the inquiry into the retired CN pensioners, and time and time again the answer has been "soon". I could ask, how soon is soon, but I will ask this. Is it not possible to contact the Justice, either by telephone or telegram, and find out whether it will be three weeks, three months, six months, or 30 days?

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Labour): Yes, Mr. Speaker, it is possible to contact the Doctor, and the hon. member will be pleased to know that I am quite prepared to do that, but I must say that he has been contacted on several occasions. The matter is more complex than perhaps anyone had anticipated at first, and this has protracted the hearings. He does not feel that it will be worthy of his efforts or in the interests of the employees if he unduly rushes the matter, and that is the situation at the present time.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

INQUIRY WHETHER PRIME MINISTER SOUGHT ADVICE ON APPLICABILITY OF GUIDELINES TO SKY SHOPS SITUATION

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice and arises out of the Prime Minister's answer to the question asked by the hon. member for Peace River. I wonder whether the Minister of Justice, in his capacity as chief law officer of the Crown, has advised the Prime Minister of the significance of the guidelines respecting the conduct of members of parliament, and particularly respecting guidelines No. 2 which provides:

Members of Parliament should make every reasonable effort to avoid even the appearance of those conflicts of interest that are not inherent in a representative democracy.

Has the Prime Minister sought the advice of the Attorney General of Canada, or has the Attorney General of Canada advised the Prime Minister, with respect to these very important guidelines that affect the dignity of parliament, so that indeed justice and right are seen to be done as well as in fact are done?

Hon. Ron Basford (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, the initiator of the guidelines and of the guidelines process was the Prime Minister himself. In the course of preparing the guidelines the government had the benefit of the advice of the Attorney General, who of course was a member of the government that produced the guidelines.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In view of the answer by the Attorney General, which indicates his obvious concern about the present situation relating to these guidelines which apply Senator Giguère, will the Attorney General, as chief law officer of the Crown, undertake to the House to refresh the

Oral Questions

memory of the Prime Minister with respect to the guidelines of which he claims to be the father?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

• (1500)

Mr. McGrath: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is prompted by the importance of this part of our parliamentary day, namely, the question period, especially since the present rules were adopted in 1968 which did away with committee of supply, thus making the question period the only part of the parliamentary day when the government can be held accountable. My point of order is also prompted by my concern over the growing tendency of ministers to be evasive in their answers to questions.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. McGrath: For example, the tendency is growing for ministers to take questions as notice and say, "I will look into the question and answer it later", and that is the last we ever hear of it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, our predicament is even more compounded by the fact that we are now operating under provisional rules which deny us the right to raise points of order or questions of privilege during the question period. Hence, there is no opportunity given to members on this side of the House—or on any side, for that matter—to hold minister accountable for undertakings they make during the course of the question period to supply answers at a later date.

Today, for example, I endeavoured to direct a question supplementary to one asked by the hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre (Mr. Benjamin) to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan), asking him to fulfil an undertaking he had made to me in answer to a question I directed to him on November 25 regarding a very important matter, namely, a directive that has been sent to the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency by the Anti-Inflation Board regarding an increase in the price of eggs, which, in the opinion of the Anti-Inflation Board, could not be justified in the face of evidence which indicated that the price of feed grain had gone down.

The minister indicated, on November 25 when I directed the question to him, that he would be meeting with the Farm Products Marketing Council, thereby implying that he would undertake to obtain an answer to my question; that is, whether the Farm Products Marketing Council had endeavoured to determine whether the price increase by CEMA was in fact justified and such communication sent to the Anti-Inflation Board.

I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, with great deference and respect, that we are constrained and, indeed, impeded in carrying out our responsibilities of holding the government accountable in the face of the growing practice of ministers to be evasive by putting off replies to questions, giving the undertaking that they will look into the matter and reply at a later date, and knowing full well that members of the opposition have no way, under the present rules—especially under the provisional rules—to hold ministers accountable. I submit that the tendency toward this