

Oral Questions

now intend to proceed with this kind of program for those in the country who need it the most?

Hon. John N. Turner (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, that question ought to be referred to my colleague the Minister of National Health and Welfare who spoke on behalf of the government at a federal-provincial conference.

Mr. Broadbent: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I saw the minister winking across the House, which surely suggests we should take his answer with some skepticism. I am asking him this question as Minister of Finance, and I think it is a reasonable assumption for us to make if past practices of parliamentary government have been observed by the cabinet, that he played a crucial role in this decision. Is it his view as Minister of Finance that the government cannot afford to implement this program at this time?

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the hon. gentleman that no question that he has put to me so far has made me blink. The hon. gentleman ought to refer to the address my colleague made to the federal-provincial conference of welfare ministers; the government's position is contained fully in that document.

Mr. Broadbent: A final supplementary question. I am in fact referring to an earlier speech made by that minister in November, when he documented the problems of the poor in our society. I conclude with this question. Is it the minister's view, as Minister of Finance, that the \$500 million only that the federal government would have to put up under changes to the Canada Assistance Plan—which would be the best route to take in this regard—are beyond the fiscal capabilities of this government?

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, my view was expressed by my colleague at the conference.

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[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICE

USE OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE WORKERS DURING PUBLIC SERVICE STRIKES—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. René Matte (Champlain): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the President of the Treasury Board.

Could he tell the House whether the government is considering generalizing the policy already partially established of hiring private contractors to do the work usually done by the public service employees now on strike and, second, does he consider normal that the same work in the same department is paid at different levels depending on whether the employee belongs to the public service or works for a private contractor, in which case his salary is much higher?

Hon. Jean Chrétien (President of Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, in cases where external help is required, we must take into account the fact that these employees are hired only temporarily, and sometimes even for a few hours or a few days, and their salary basis cannot be the same as that which applies to people who work throughout

[Mr. Broadbent.]

the year. When employees are on strike, as they are now, it is not government policy to hire staff from the private sector to replace them. However, when public servants are illegally on strike, I believe the government is entitled to replace them by people from the private sector.

[English]

USE OF PAY RESEARCH BUREAU AS BASIS FOR NEGOTIATION WITH GENERAL LABOUR AND TRADES GROUP

Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Dartmouth-Halifax East): Mr. Speaker, I want to direct a question that is supplementary to the earlier questions asked of the President of the Treasury Board. In view of the fact that a confidential report prepared by the federal pay research bureau has indicated that the workers in the general labour and trades group are paid at a lower rate than those in comparable positions in the private sector, and because it has been intimated that unless these anomalies are corrected the public service will face a severe labour shortage within the next decade, will the Minister indicate whether or not he would consider using this report as a basis for further negotiations, in an effort to resume settlement talks in the public interest?

Hon. Jean Chrétien (President of Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, we do not accept the premise contained in this question. I think there is no problem at all at this time getting employees to work for the government.

Mr. Forrestall: A further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. May I ask the minister whether or not he is, in fact, in possession of a confidential report from the pay research bureau which indicates that members of the general labour and trades group are paid at a rate substantially lower than or not comparable with the general prevailing rates in the given zones and areas across the country?

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I am told that this statement is incorrect. Sometimes we are not talking about the same kind of employees. Some who work in maintenance positions cannot be compared with those who work in the construction industry, and so on. I think they do compare with people having similar occupations in the private sector. If we are wrong in some instances then we will be willing to correct those errors, but I am told that there are no such errors at the moment.

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FINANCE

INQUIRY AS TO WHETHER GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES WITHIN GUIDELINES

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, my question is supplementary to that posed to the Minister of Finance by the Leader of the Opposition regarding his pursuit of voluntary restraints and guidelines. Is the 28 per cent increase in federal spending represented by the estimates that have now been put before the House within government guidelines, and if not is the minister trying to tell us that he is in the position of imposing restraints on others that he is not prepared to impose on the government?