

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): If the hon. member is asking about the situation in practice, I would say we would have to see what the Board says. If he is asking for guidance on what the law and the white paper asserts, I can tell him that when questions of this kind are referred to us the cabinet is not bound automatically by the statement of the AIB. This is the spirit of the law which was discussed in the House. There is provision for a final reference to the government of such questions and, of course, if there is such a reference the intention is that the government should examine the question and make a decision in the national interest.

DATE OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH BOARD ON POSTAL WORKERS' CONTRACT—NAME OF GOVERNMENT NEGOTIATOR

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): May I ask the Prime Minister whether in accordance with the terms of the order in council negotiations did take place between the Board and both parties in order to achieve satisfactory changes and, if so, when these negotiations took place and who acted on behalf of the government?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): In the past few days, members of the Anti-Inflation Board have communicated with members of the government.

NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN POSTMASTER GENERAL AND BOARD ON POSTAL WORKERS' CONTRACT

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): May I ask the Postmaster General whether he has had any communication with the Anti-Inflation Board since this statement was made, or leaked, as the case may be? If so, could he tell the House the nature of those discussions and could he also inform us at what time the government referred its final wage offer to the Anti-Inflation Board which, under the law, is the final adjudicator of what is, or what is not, within the guidelines?

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Postmaster General): I believe I answered this question to some degree yesterday. The employer of record is the Treasury Board. The collective agreement, if requested by the Anti-Inflation Board would be requested of the employer, namely the Treasury Board, and I am not authorized to speak with authority on behalf of the President of the Treasury Board. I did, however, negotiate on his behalf and at his request; I was delegated by him to do so, as is his right. But in relation to any discussions, formal or otherwise, with the Anti-Inflation Board, I may say that these would properly be conducted through the Treasury Board.

NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN BOARD AND PRESIDENT OF THE TREASURY BOARD ON POSTAL WORKERS' CONTRACT

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): In the absence of the President of the Treasury Board, may I ask the Prime Minister whether the President of the Treasury Board has negotiated with the Anti-Inflation Board on behalf of the government? If so, perhaps the right hon.

Oral Questions

gentleman would also tell the House why the Postmaster General was not included in those discussions.

● (1420)

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Surely, Mr. Speaker, it is a matter for the government which minister is to communicate with the Anti-Inflation Board. As the House knows, one minister is responsible for the board, another is responsible for the administrator. We will always make sure that the Anti-Inflation Board can contact a senior and responsible minister.

GOVERNMENT POSITION ON POSTAL WORKERS CONTRACT IN VIEW OF IMPLIED DECISION OF BOARD

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, since the Prime Minister has indicated that the government has not heard formally from the Anti-Inflation Board and for that reason has made the decision to have a meeting later tonight, that point notwithstanding, Mr. Pepin, the president of the board, stated on CBC Radio yesterday, as quoted in the press today, that "the gap is too wide between the basic first year raise of 10 per cent permitted under the federal the program and the 30 month award", and so on. In other words, whatever communication the government will receive formally, Mr. Pepin has already publicly declared on behalf of the Board that the Board has decided—

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Broadbent:—that the offer of the government to the postal workers is too high. I should like to ask the Prime Minister—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent:—since that is the case, will the government stand by its own contractual agreement that it entered into with the postal workers?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I learned not later than last week that it is not safe to make decisions on the basis of quotations, right or otherwise, of Mr. Pepin's statements. I think the House would think it only fair that we see the position in writing. We are told that we will get it this afternoon or that the Board is going to communicate with us. I think it would be not only unethical but contrary to the spirit of the law and the Inquiries Act if the government were to make a response on the basis of a quote by the hon. member of something that might have been said last night or some other time.

Mr. Broadbent: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister knows full well that the quote I referred to last week—

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Broadbent:—was accurate. The question I will put to him is this. Given the government's own decision about what an appropriate offer is or ought to be for the postal workers, and given the existence of Bill C-73 which, when it becomes law, will make it possible for the government to make a decision that goes against the Anti-Inflation Board,