

Hon. Donald C. Jamieson (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am aware of the hon. member's interest, as well as that of other hon. members of the House, in this subject. I am not exactly sure what the formulation ought to be or what technique ought to be employed, but certainly I will look into it and see if there is merit in having a special centre either in CIDA or in External Affairs in order to co-ordinate these kinds of activities on a world scale.

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CONSUMER AFFAIRS

INCREASE IN PRICE OF TURKEYS

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Earlier this week, the minister was advised of charges made by the chairman of the Canadian Turkey Marketing Agency that turkeys were being stockpiled and, hence, withheld from the market in order to drive up prices. The Minister of Agriculture said in the House this morning, "increases should not be there as far as we are concerned."

In view of the fact that the price of turkeys is already 25 per cent more than it was this time last year, and the information already given to the House by the Minister of Agriculture, what has the minister learned from his inquiries with respect to this obvious profiteering at a time when more and more Canadians are depending on turkey as a cheap source of protein?

Hon. Warren Allmand (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, we did find that the wholesalers had held back approximately one-third of their produce but that that was not irregular in terms of what is usually done. It is usually found that producers sell about one-third of their production each year during the Christmas holiday season. What is being held back this year is pretty much in line with what was held back in other years. In fact, what is being held back has already been sold to different retailers.

On the other hand, I was disappointed by the fact that as of November 1 the stocks on hand were only 50 million pounds, whereas last year they were 72 million pounds. We believe that there should have been an increase in production this year because of the increase in the price of beef and a tendency by consumers to move to alternative sources of protein. Therefore, we would have liked to see greater production this year, but that has not been done.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious matter, especially in light of the consumer price index today which is showing a substantial increase in food prices, even with the new weighting scale that is now in the CPI which places less emphasis on food.

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Has the minister examined the cause for price increases, in light of what the Minister of Agriculture said? For example,

Oral Questions

he said that there are adequate supplies. Now we know that the price increases are not going to producers; someone is ripping off consumers. Clearly, it is the minister's responsibility to find out who, and to take the necessary steps. Is he doing that?

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, we have looked into it and we are continuing to look into it. We have not had any evidence that anyone is ripping off the consumer. We have found that supply has decreased and demand has increased, and that as a result of those market conditions prices have gone up. If one compares the production of last year—72 million pounds in stock as of November 1—last year there was more on hand than this year, with a lower demand. The demand has gone up sharply this year because of the increased price of beef, and the supply has not been there. That is the reason for increased prices, not any ripping off.

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IMMIGRATION

REFUGEE ARGENTINIAN POLITICAL PRISONERS AND FAMILIES

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I had hoped to address my question to the Minister of Employment and Immigration, but I will direct it to his parliamentary secretary, the hon. member for Wellington.

On May 16, 1978, the minister announced with some fanfare that he was setting up a special program to admit up to 100 Argentinian political prisoners and their families as refugees. He described the situation of these political prisoners as extremely desperate. On October 30, the hon. member for Egmont, the hon. member for Montmorency, and myself, wrote to the minister giving him the information that the military authorities in Argentina had refused permission for the Canadian government to visit all but two persons with a view to carrying out this promise. In fact, no one has been admitted under this program. So far, apart from—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I must ask the hon. member to put his question.

Mr. Brewin: Mr. Speaker, the minister has barely acknowledged the question. Will the parliamentary secretary tell the House whether the Canadian government has forcefully called the attention of the Argentinian government to its failure to co-operate in the case of these persons who, to use the minister's words, are extremely desperate and are presently imprisoned as political prisoners?

Mr. Frank Maine (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I will take notice of the question and get back to the hon. member.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!