

Oral Questions

[Translation]

and I should like to indicate that the RCMP are not empowered to open the mail and that they are not opening it. For years I have held an opinion which I have expressed in the House, but until the whole matter has been considered by cabinet, after the McDonald report has been received and appropriate amendments have been made to the act, there is no way we will authorize the RCMP or any other police force in Canada to open the mail of Canadians.

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[English]

MARINE TRANSPORT**FUEL SURCHARGE EXEMPTION—REQUEST FOR EXTENSION**

Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Dartmouth-Halifax East): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance and it concerns the question which I raised last week about bunker and diesel surcharges for Canadian flagships. May I ask the minister whether he is prepared to indicate to the House today the preparedness of government to extend the exemption which already exists for vessel trips between Canadian ports in Canadian waters, to all Canadian flagships prior to March 31, which he will recognize as an important date for the Canadian shipping industry?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, the hon. member will remember that there was a definite purpose in recommending a marine and aviation charge, because foreign fleets and foreign airlines were, in a sense, being subsidized by imported Canadian oil, and compensated by the Canadian taxpayer. In an effort to gather from these carriers the world price for oil, we put forward this particular proposal.

My officials have had very extensive discussion with representatives of the industry and with other departments. We have made a number of changes in order to meet the requirements, particularly of the Canadian fleet. We are still satisfied that this is the right course of action in the interests of Canada without jeopardizing the competitive situation of Canadian carriers in comparison with foreign carriers.

The hon. member mentioned the date of March 31. I do not know whether he had in mind that that was the date on which the charge was to take effect. If that is so I would like to tell him that, for administrative reasons, I am delaying for some weeks the tabling of the ways and means motion to bring the charge into effect.

Mr. Forrestall: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the minister's response, but he left me with the impression that he is unaware of the inequity that this imposes upon one mode of Canadian transport as opposed to other modes. I was specifically wondering if the minister could indicate to us whether he is prepared to extend to all Canadian flagships the type of exemption that should be given to certain classes of Canadian flagships with respect to the movement of goods? Or, is he

about to build in an inequity and place in serious jeopardy the capacity of the Great Lakes shipping fleet to move grain from Thunder Bay out to salt water and iron ore back up the system, at an economical and advantageous commercial rate? Is he giving consideration to making sure that Canadian business entrepreneurs can operate and receive equal treatment from government regulations, whether or not they may be in trucking, in rail, in shipping or in air?

Mr. MacEachen: Indeed, Madam Speaker, that is our desire, not to create a bias in favour of any particular mode or, to put it another way, to discriminate against other modes of transportation. I will be pleased to examine the detailed question put by the hon. member about the application of this order.

In conclusion, I would say to him that the purpose of this is to try to put those carriers in international commerce on the same level as their competitors on international routes, both air and marine. That is the purpose, in order to equalize the purchase of oil at the world price.

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POINT OF ORDER**MR. ANDRE—USE OF DOLLAR ITEMS IN SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (C)—RULING BY MADAM SPEAKER**

Madam Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Centre (Mr. Andre) addressed the House yesterday on a point of order relating to the use of one dollar items in the Supplementary Estimates (C), 1980-81. He alleges that these dollar items are being used to legislate programs rather than simply to seek the approval of the spending of money for programs previously authorized by statute, or that they amend legislation other than former appropriation acts.

The hon. member recited the history of these estimates since the substantial rule changes in 1968. Under the old system, there was opportunity in the committee of supply to take exception to items in the estimates and they were objected to but nevertheless tolerated.

Since 1968 there has been only limited time to consider supplementary estimates, hence it was felt that they should be restricted to proper items and not contain anything that should be done by statute.

In 1971 hon. members commenced to take exception to those items in supplementary estimates which in effect were amending statutes other than appropriation acts. The hon. member mentioned those occasions commencing with the ruling of March 10, 1971, leading to the ruling of December 7, 1977, on a point of order which the hon. member himself had raised on that occasion.

Because it was a new point in 1971, the Speaker disallowed only some of the items objected to on the ground that they were obvious amendments to statutes other than appropriation acts while permitting, with a warning, less obvious items to remain in the estimates. On December 10, 1973, the three