

Oral Questions

Mr. Muir: I thank the minister for his reply. In light of the hardship suffered by claimants and their families as a result of delays in receiving their cheques, such delays ranging from two weeks to 12 to 14 weeks, would the minister consider making it mandatory for these claims to be put into manual pay as soon as a delay of two weeks exists?

Mr. Andras: I really would appreciate from all hon. members exact details of these incidents so that I can have my office look into them. We had a session today with the chairman of the commission and I am satisfied he is exerting every effort to speed up these payments. But I should like to be given specific instances which might help me to assist him.

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COMMUNICATIONS**BELL CANADA RATE INCREASE APPLICATION—INQUIRY AS TO OPPOSITION BY GOVERNMENT**

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. member for Wellington-Grey-Dufferin-Waterloo have a supplementary?

Mr. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Grey-Dufferin-Waterloo): It is not a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, but I do have an important question to ask.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the House will permit the hon. member to ask his question before we call orders of the day.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Beatty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Communications. In light of the increased profit arising from last year's operations by Bell Canada, has the minister decided to make representations to the Canadian Transport Commission concerning their application for increases in rates?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Gérard Pelletier (Minister of Communications): I am happy, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. member asked me this question which had already been asked. We have completed our consideration of this issue. Our consideration led us to a negative conclusion; under the National Transportation Act the governor general in council has the power to change or cancel any decision made by the commission, either unilaterally or following a petition. Although this power has been rarely exercised the fact still remains that its use could place the government, considering it has already intervened at the tariff hearings, in the incompatible role of both judge and plaintiff.

However, the necessity of making representations from time to time being very important—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. minister. I think he will agree with me that a statement such as the one he wishes to make at this time in the House should normally be made on motions. It seems to me that his answer to the hon. member although interest-

[Mr. Andras.]

ing and important goes somewhat beyond the normal time allotted to answer a question.

• (1500)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS**FOOD PRICES****MOTION TO APPOINT SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE OF SENATE AND HOUSE**

Mr. MacEachen: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, which might be dealt with by the House now. In view of the interest shown by hon. members in taking part in this debate, the suggestion has been made that following the initial statements subsequent speakers ought to limit their remarks to 20 minutes. I am not pressing this point, but I am raising it so that it might be settled now, rather than later, and in order that we may seek out some understanding.

Mr. Baldwin: We would agree with that. The urgency of the situation, the high cost of food, makes it imperative that as many members as possible participate in the debate.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I believe this was our proposal. We are glad it is being accepted.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I still maintain my support for this motion, as I did at the meeting of the House leaders.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker: Is it agreed and so ordered?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Hon. Herb Gray (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs) moved:

That a Special Joint Committee of the Senate and of the House of Commons be appointed to inquire into and make recommendations upon the trends in food prices in Canada and factors domestic and foreign which account for these trends;

That 20 Members of the House of Commons to be designated by House at a later date be the members of the Special Joint Committee and that Standing Order 65(5) of the House of Commons be suspended in relation thereto;

That the said Committee have power to send for persons, papers and records and examine witnesses; to sit during periods when the House stands adjourned; to report from time to time and to print such papers and evidence from day to day as may be deemed advisable; to delegate to sub-committees all or any of their powers except the power to report direct to the House; to engage the services of counsel, accountants and such other clerical and technical personnel as may be deemed necessary; and

That a message be sent to the Senate requesting that House to unite with this House for the above purpose, and to select if the