

Oral Questions

since negotiations resumed at about 9.30 this morning and are proceeding at a fairly satisfactory pace.

INTERPRETATION OF STRIKE VOTE

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): My supplementary arises from news reports interpreting the vote which has just been completed by the postal workers as a strike vote. Can the minister confirm that the vote actually calls for endorsement of the national executive's formal written request to the government calling for further negotiations on the basis of the Moisan report and emphasizes vital issues such as fringe benefits, job security, automation and the employment of casual workers rather than the monetary issue as such?

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Postmaster General): Yes, Mr. Speaker. The vote just taken is subject to interpretation by whomever wants to interpret it in their own way. To suggest it is an overwhelming vote by the membership for strike action would be unfair to the members. For instance, no fewer than 15 locals in the maritimes, which usually show some intelligence—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mackasey:—there are just pockets of them—have said they want to know just what they are voting on. What is more important is that we are back to the bargaining table. Workers, with the exception of those in only one little area in Canada, are working. Of course, if workers in too many areas stop working, as is their right, we would have to break off negotiations in order to permit the national executive and the negotiating team to talk reason to these people for jeopardizing what could be a fair settlement as an alternative to a prolonged strike.

EXISTENCE OF CONTINGENCY PLAN FOR MAIL DELIVERY IN EVENT OF STRIKE

Mr. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South): Are we to take it from the remarks of the hon. gentleman that there is, in fact, a contingency plan in existence to assist small businesses and private individuals to move mail in the event that the postal workers do not carry on their duties, or is he simply telling the House that this is something which would be looked into at a later date?

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Postmaster General): I am not telling the hon. gentleman, either. I am simply saying that the news last night stated that the government has a contingency plan for its own mail, as I mentioned earlier, for the distribution of essential cheques and social benefit payments. In a democracy such as ours some segments of the economy must be severely, sometimes unjustifiably, inconvenienced; but that is the price of our particular system.

POSSIBLE EXEMPTION OF EMPLOYEES FROM WAGE GUIDELINES—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, may I direct my question to the Prime Minister. In light of the fact that the Postmaster General has

[Mr. Mackasey.]

indicated that postal workers are exempt under the escape provisions per se, while at the same time the Minister of Finance says no, that is not so, that any decision in this regard must go before the anti-inflation board—so we have a conflict here—would the Prime Minister clear up the matter?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, there is no conflict unless it is in the hon. member's understanding. The white paper applies to everyone. The white paper itself contains the statement that special consideration will be given to certain cases, which are defined. Special consideration will indeed be given by the Anti-Inflation Board; it will judge whether any actions which have been taken by the federal government are within the guidelines, and we will respect the board's judgment.

* * *

[Translation]

THE CANADIAN ECONOMY

POSSIBILITY OF QUEBEC ESTABLISHING ANTI-INFLATION BOARD

Mr. Maurice Dupras (Labelle): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a question to the right hon. Prime Minister. It is supplementary to those which the Leader of the Opposition directed to him concerning the provincial board Premier Bourassa intends to establish.

Will the Canadian government be invited to share the cost of such a commission or board, or will the province of Quebec fully assume the cost of such a board?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, this aspect was not discussed with the provinces. I am grateful to the hon. member for bringing it to my attention. My first reply would be that if a province wished to establish its own board instead of using ours, it would have to assume all costs, as it is indeed the case when a province—Quebec for instance and Ontario sometimes—has its own tax-collecting agency. It must then assume the whole cost.

[English]

ANTI-INFLATION PROGRAM—EFFECT ON FARM INCOME AND RETAIL FOOD PRICES

Mr. John Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Prime Minister. Was the Minister of Agriculture expressing government opinion with respect to the new wage and price controls policy of the government when he said recently in St. Jacob's, Ontario that Ottawa's wage and price controls will have no effect on farm incomes and little impact on retail food prices?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I will take notice of that question. I did not understand it, but I will take notice of it and answer on Monday.

Mr. Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that the Prime Minister did not hear the question I will repeat it because I think the answer is very important. Was the Minister of Agriculture expressing government opinion with respect to the new wage and price controls policy of the government when he said recently in St. Jacob's,