

Oral Questions

until he did anything to control the economy. What we are asking from this side is why, in order to avoid the level of industrial disputes now taking place in Canada because workers have experienced a net loss of income in each of the past three years and will have a net loss of income in 1981, the Prime Minister is waiting for wages to catch up? Why does the government not act now on the price side whether it is in housing, in food, or in any other sector, so that the ordinary worker does not have to push up his wages?

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, the hon. member suggests some area of concern. He knows that the two main areas of concern now are food prices and energy prices. It would be interesting to hear from the hon. member how he would expect us to control food prices and, perhaps, to control energy prices any more than we are doing now in so far as Canadian production of energy is concerned.

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RAILWAYS**CROWSNEST PASS RATE—GOVERNMENT POSITION**

Hon. Jake Epp (Provencher): Madam Speaker, I should like to ask a very straightforward question of the Right Hon. Prime Minister. Has the cabinet made a decision on the Crowsnest Pass freight rates?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Yes, Madam Speaker, we have made a decision not to deal with the Crowsnest Pass freight rates until there is a very strong demand from representatives of western farm groups and other groups to touch the Crowsnest rates.

Mr. Epp: If that is the position of the government at present, can the Prime Minister explain to us why the minister in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board would be phoning his past political friends telling them to start the campaign, that he has lost the fight in cabinet on Crow rates and that the campaign to oppose the government's position should start?

Mr. Trudeau: I cannot comment on those phone calls about which I know nothing, but I can tell the hon. member that some farm leaders have met with the Minister of Transport, with other ministers, and with myself, in recent weeks, and some of them have advocated reopening the Crow rate and examining a new approach to transportation in the west, which would mean changing the Crow rate. I told them—and yesterday I said it publicly—that we do not want to fiddle with the Crow rate unless there is some very strong feeling throughout the west that this rate should be reopened and the question re-examined. I imagine that any phone call along the lines referred to by the hon. member would have been to tell these community leaders exactly what I told them, that is “if you want the Crow rate to be reopened and re-examined, you had better say it loud and clear because we will not do it on our own initiative.”

PENSIONS**NATIONAL PENSIONS CONFERENCE—REQUEST MADE BY PROFESSIONAL INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC SERVICE**

Mr. Thomas Siddon (Richmond-South Delta): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare as she is responsible for the National Pensions Conference to be held in Ottawa from March 31 to April 2. I want to ask the minister why it is that the conference co-ordinator, Mr. Guy Fortier, has written the following to the president of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada:

I am very sorry that we cannot accede to your request to have the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada attend the National Pensions Conference . . . there are literally hundreds of separate organizations such as yours—

I want to ask the Minister of National Health and Welfare why she is denying those public servants who represent the largest pension funds in Canada the opportunity to attend and to participate in this conference.

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Madam Speaker, I am not aware of that particular letter. The conference will accommodate the maximum participation. Right now we think that more than 300 participants plus media representatives will be active at the Conference Centre. The participation will be divided equally among the main players, and surely, as the hon. member says, the super-annuation officials, both employers and employees, are the key players in the pension system in Canada. Therefore, I will look into the particular letter referred to by the hon. member, which, of course, was given to us out of context. By the way, Madam Speaker, I welcome the interest of the Tory party in this matter. It is now a month before the conference and this is the first question we have had from them on this subject. This is remarkable progress.

EXCLUSION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

Mr. Thomas Siddon (Richmond-South Delta): Madam Speaker, although the minister pleads ignorance of this question, it is a fact that her officials have directed that some 16,900 members of PIPS will not be allowed to attend this conference, and I presume that neither will the 500,000 Canadians who are employed by the Government of Canada who have entrusted over \$20 billion in the form of an unfunded liability into the hands of the Government of Canada.

My supplementary question is directed to the President of the Treasury Board. Does the minister, who is responsible for the pensions of public service employees, and in fact is benefiting from the third party benefit which the government receives by way of a \$2 billion annual subsidy to the government's budget, condone the exclusion of his own employees from this very important pensions conference?

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, I do not know where the hon. member gets his numbers. I intend to sit down with him one of