

Oral Questions

can the Minister allow this double standard, and what will he do about it?

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Minister of Supply and Services): Madam Speaker, the hon. gentleman is dealing with a story that arose out of procurement by my Department of turbo fuel in the international market, in order to supply DND aircraft abroad. The measure that is used in the international marketplace is American gallons.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Blais: That is why we have used that particular standard, limited to the international market. In terms of the domestic market, I can assure the hon. gentleman that all of our measures are metric.

• (1450)

REQUEST THAT IMPERIAL MEASUREMENT APPLY TO FUEL SALES

Mr. W. C. Scott (Victoria-Haliburton): Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is also directed to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Now that his Department has admitted that the world unit for some fuels is gallons, I ask the Minister will he withdraw all prohibitions against the sale of fuel in gallons in Canada.

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Minister of Supply and Services): Madam Speaker, the hon. gentleman should have listened to the reply that I gave to him initially. I will provide him with the details of our procurement system. In terms of international procurement, when we deal with international suppliers for DND bases outside Canada we are dealing in that context with American gallons. Inside Canada, of course, our requirements are measured in metric terms.

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CONSUMER AFFAIRS

REQUEST FOR LEGISLATION TO PERMIT CLASS ACTIONS

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Yesterday the Supreme Court of Canada dealt a body blow to Canadian consumers in ruling against the class action suit that over 4,000 owners of defective Firenza automobiles brought against General Motors of Canada Ltd. The Supreme Court, in dismissing this claim, stated that there is, and I quote:

—undoubtedly a need for legislative intervention in this country ... and a comprehensive legislative scheme for the institution and conduct of class actions.

Since the early 1970s the federal Government and this Minister in particular have promised to amend the Combines Investigation Act to facilitate class action suits. When is the Government finally going to bring forward these long overdue amendments to the Combines Investigation Act to permit class actions, and stop the gouging of Canadian consumers?

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Madam Speaker, like the Hon. Member, I certainly wish this session of Parliament would end so that in a new session, we could expect to consider other bills, and especially amendments to the Combines Investigation Act. To answer the Hon. Member's question, I would say that in this particular case, since what we have here is a civil suit, the provinces would have to be asked to amend their provincial legislation so as to allow civil class actions. The Hon. Member is no doubt aware that this kind of legislation already exists in Quebec, although not in the other provinces, unfortunately. I hope that the decision of the Supreme Court will be an incentive to the nine other provinces to allow their citizens to bring class actions in civil suits in the same way this is being done in Quebec.

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[English]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC EXPANSION

BENEFITS TO SMALL BUSINESS OF CROWNEST RAILWAY RATE CHANGES

Mr. F. Oberle (Prince George-Peace River): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. As he knows, British Columbia is experiencing an excessive rate of unemployment and business failures and bankruptcies above the national average. Despite the fact that there is a mega project, the coal in the Northeast and the port development in Prince Rupert, unfortunately Canadian workers and Canadian small businessmen, in particular, are usually on the outside looking in.

I would like to ask the Minister what safeguards are being put in place to ensure that as the Minister of Transport spends \$6 billion, and industrial development spends \$4 billion on the upgrading of transportation infrastructure in the West, small Canadian firms and their employees will have a share of the pie. Are there tax incentives planned? Is he discussing with his colleagues the prospect of talking with the unions to ensure that average workers will get a job?

Hon. Ed Lumley (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce and Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member poses a very good question. Our office of regional industrial benefits has worked very closely with the officials of my colleague, the Minister of Transport, on the industrial benefits for western Canada as a result of the changes in the Crow rate.

One example is the potential \$418 million contract for signalling and communications equipment, which at the present time is being imported by the railways, which is an excellent opportunity for western Canada. We will try to break