

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICE

ALLEGED CONTRIBUTION OF DEPARTMENT TO REDUCTION IN POSTAL SERVICE

Hon. J. Gilles Lamontagne (Langelier): Mr. Speaker, we did not, of course, get a clear and specific answer from the President of the Treasury Board. In view of the promise made by this government to eliminate 60,000 civil service jobs, could the Postmaster General tell us what has been his department's contribution up to now to this generous promise as a result of which postal services are eliminated or reduced just about everywhere in Canada?

[English]

Hon. John A. Fraser (Postmaster General and Minister of the Environment): No, Mr. Speaker, I cannot give an exact answer except to say this: under my direction there has been strict adherence to the principle which was enunciated earlier by this party, and then by this government, that there would be no reduction in person-years except by attrition. I have pointed out, as the hon. member well knows, publicly to a committee of this House that the difficulty in the Post Office is that we are having a serious problem in maintaining service and that it is not a department of government that can withstand severe cuts in personnel.

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Nipissing): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Postmaster General. We have now heard this minister indicate twice that he has taken positions that are diametrically opposed to the decisions or the policies of this government, first in terms of opening the mail and now in terms of the 2 per cent cutback. In view of the fact the minister has made public declarations on two of the major issues that affect his department, should he not be successful in persuading the members of the cabinet of the position that he has made public is he ready to submit his resignation?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The question is, of course, hypothetical by its very nature.

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AGRICULTURE

COMPENSATION FOR POTATO GROWERS

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): My question is for the Minister of Agriculture. It concerns a very serious problem in the Atlantic provinces, namely, the fact that many potato growers in the Atlantic provinces have seen all or part of their crop rot because they cannot find markets for it. This is the third year in a row that potatoes have been sold at less than the cost of production.

Can the minister guarantee the producers in that part of Canada that there will be compensation so that they will at least get back the cost of production? Can he assure the House

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there will be a pay-out under the stabilization plan to the potato farmers in eastern Canada?

Hon. John Wise (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member touches on a very serious problem. I have answered questions on this very subject over the last number of days. As of today, no, I cannot stand here and say there will be a stabilization payment for the 1978 crop year; nor can I, in all honesty, say there will be participation on behalf of the federal government with reference to the diversion program that the maritime producers want.

● (1500)

I fully appreciate the difficulty in which the potato producers of Canada find themselves. This afternoon I am meeting with two of my provincial counterparts to discuss this whole situation.

Mr. Nystrom: In the light of the fact that Irving Oil, of all companies, has bought out a potato processor in Prince Edward Island, and that Europeans are now purchasing potato farms in the Atlantic provinces, will the minister take the initiative and begin discussions with the provincial governments and the producers with a view to forming a potato marketing board or commission along similar lines to the Canadian Wheat Board, so as to ensure producers some protection?

Mr. Wise: With reference to the hon. member's first question, it seems to me he is talking more about land use or land tenure control, and that, as I am sure he will appreciate, is an area which lies directly within the control of the provincial governments. With reference to his second question, that is the number one item we intend to discuss this afternoon. I am pretty certain that my officials have been successful in setting up meetings with all my provincial counterparts in eastern Canada for dates prior to the Christmas recess.

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[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICE

ACTION TO BE TAKEN AGAINST PERSONNEL GUILTY OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY IN QUEBEC REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN

Mr. Gaston Isabelle (Hull): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Solicitor General. In a recent newsletter, the Public Service Alliance allowed its members to take part in non-political and non-partisan activities in the Quebec referendum campaign, thus endorsing the position taken by the Public Service Commission. Now, Mr. Speaker, unless one is very naive, it is obvious that political and partisan activities will take place during the Quebec referendum campaign. I therefore ask, what will be the grievance procedure against civil servants who might break the law to the effect that only a candidate in an election can file a complaint with the Public Service Commission? Since there will be no election or candi-