

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, that figure is absurd—absolutely absurd. The Hon. Member proposes this absurd figure and asks us why.

Mr. Broadbent: We'll give you the figures for that.

Mr. Andre: My question is why the Hon. Member has such a vivid imagination and why will he not look at the facts as they are there. He will see that it is a good Bill.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

* * *

CANADA POST CORPORATION

ANTICIPATED INCREASE IN POSTAL RATES

Mr. Alfonso Gagliano (Saint-Léonard—Anjou): Mr. Speaker, I have in my hand a report from CP wire service in which the office of the Minister responsible for Canada Post is quoted as stating that the Minister still expects the price of a first-class stamp to jump to 36 cents from 34 cents by next March despite opposition from the Government's own back bench. Why did the Minister mislead his own caucus, the House, and all Canadians yesterday by referring the rate increase to a committee when he already says that in March he expects an increase?

[Translation]

Hon. Michel Côté (Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion): Mr. Speaker, first of all, it is this Government's concern to respond to the needs of Canadians by providing a better and more reliable service at affordable cost. That is why we set up the Marchment Committee which, after examining the issues and travelling across this country, submitted 29 representations. We have adopted 28, so we are indeed responding to the needs of Canadians.

INQUIRY WHY ALL PLANS OF CORPORATIONS NOT REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

Mr. Alfonso Gagliano (Saint-Léonard—Anjou): Mr. Speaker, if yesterday's announcement was not a total farce, why doesn't the Minister refer all Canada Post's plans to a committee instead of just the postal rate increase? If the Government is being serious about this, why doesn't it let Parliament have full scrutiny of these plans?

Hon. Michel Côté (Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion): Mr. Speaker, I repeat that if the Hon. Member had read the recommendations in the Marchment Report, he would have noticed that the report recommends providing either alternating services or installing community mail boxes. The Government has looked into the matter, and we decided to go with the community mail boxes and support the recommendation made by Canada Post.

● (1425)

[English]

PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

COST OF DRUGS

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs who just recently referred to the point made by the Leader of the NDP about the \$650 million additional cost to Canadians and said that it was an illusion and a fabrication of his imagination. Does the Minister not agree that this figure came from Currie Coopers & Lybrand, one of the biggest chartered accountant firms in Canada? Is the Minister questioning the figure presented by that firm, which is likely a Conservative firm?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Hon. Member to show me a clause in the Bill that will cause the rise in price of any drug currently on the market. I do not know how Hon. Members can talk about an increase in the price of drugs not yet discovered. An increase over what price?

Mr. Broadbent: Why do you think they want the change?

Mr. Andre: If the Leader of the NDP would allow me to answer, I would say that the Drug Prices Review Board which will be headed by Dr. Harry Eastman, the nation's expert in this area, will ensure that prices are reasonable and do not get out of line. Again I remind the Hon. Member of the fact that it has taken on average 11 and a half years for generic competition. We are proposing 10 years of exclusivity. That elementary fact would seem to indicate that there will not be the kind of dramatically high prices about which he is speaking.

TIMING OF MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, could the Minister explain why he thought it was appropriate before a Bill was tabled in the House of Commons to discuss the specifics of it? Why is he doing the bidding of the Americans? What is the rush? We have lived under existing legislation which has benefited Canadians for 17 years. What is the hurry? Why did the Minister have to call a press conference before the Bill was even introduced in the House of Commons?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I find it incredible that for the first time in history a Party would not allow us even to consider first reading.

Mr. Broadbent: Oh, go ring a few bells, Harvie.

Mr. Riis: You rushed the Chair to stop the process. Bell ringing for weeks on end.

Mr. Crosbie: Weasels and hypocrites.