

CONSUMER AFFAIRS

TIME OF SETTING UP OF JOINT SENATE-COMMONS
COMMITTEE TO INQUIRE INTO FOOD PRICES

Mrs. Grace MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. In view of the pre-new year jump in beef prices to the consumer, rising as high as 11 per cent in British Columbia, what is the earliest date at which the government can set up its announced Senate-Commons committee to inquire into food prices?

Hon. Herb Gray (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that this is a matter on which the House leaders will want to consult and I am sure they will look upon it as a matter of urgency with regard to the legislative program.

Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): A supplementary, Mr. Speaker. In view of the government's oft-repeated claim that it wants more communication with the Canadian public, what is the reason for keeping secret the possible date of the setting up of this committee?

Mr. Gray: Mr. Speaker, this is a decision for the House, not for the government, and I hope that the House will make such a decision at an early date.

Mr. Allan Lawrence (Northumberland-Durham): Mr. Speaker, I have supplementary question. I really cannot believe that this House, in the critical situation that we have—

Some hon. Members: Order, please!

Mr. Lawrence: —can the minister—

Some hon. Members: Order, please!

Mr. Lawrence: Can the minister—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Would the hon. member kindly resume his seat?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Would the hon. member resume his seat? The hon. member may ask a question but he should not argue.

Mr. Lawrence: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell the House what action the government has taken since the election, what action it is taking today and what action it is going to take tomorrow other than this dillydallying manoeuvre of a parliamentary inquiry—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Yorkton-Melville.

An hon. Member: You have no respect for parliament.

Mr. Lawrence: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member rises on a point of order.

Oral Questions

Mr. Lawrence: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, there was a reference earlier to yahoos and I did not hear the minister's reply.

Mr. Speaker: The Chair did not allow the minister to reply because the hon. member, I suggest, did not ask a question.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: I believe the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville has a supplementary.

• (1140)

Mr. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, may I rephrase the question?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Chair has recognized the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville. I will return to the hon. member in a moment.

FOOD PRICES—SCOPE OF TERMS OF REFERENCE OF
JOINT COMMITTEE

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. In view of the government's expressed intention to set up a joint committee to study the prices of food in this country, can the minister say whether or not the government will be giving that committee terms of reference that will require it to recommend action as well as study the increase in the prices of food?

Hon. Herb Gray (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am not in a position yet to outline the terms of reference that will be in the proposed motion. I hope they will be wide enough to permit the committee to do a useful job for the parliament of this country and the population as a whole.

Mr. Nystrom: A further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister say whether there will be any interim action or any immediate action before the committee is established?

Mr. Gray: Mr. Speaker, the government is continuously keeping these matters under review and I am sure will be prepared to take appropriate action.

Mr. Allan Lawrence (Northumberland-Durham): My question is still a supplementary one, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister, or the Minister of Finance, or perhaps even the Prime Minister, indicate whether the government's position has changed since the Minister of Finance, during the election, announced that the government could do nothing with respect to price escalation in this country?

Mr. Alexander: Surely one of the three can answer.

FOOD PRICES—SUGGESTED TIME LIMIT ON
DELIBERATIONS OF JOINT COMMITTEE

Mr. W. B. Nesbitt (Oxford): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell the House