

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. member has reached the point at which he will ask a question.

Mr. McGrath: I want to conclude by asking the Prime Minister whether he now intends to place a motion before the House to test its confidence in the government at this time.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): I am sure there are many ways in which the opposition can express its opposition to the government. There are bills before the House, and we shall be discussing them later. If the opposition wants to defeat them, it is perfectly free to do so.

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FOOD PRICES REVIEW BOARD

SUGGESTED NEED FOR INCREASED POWERS— GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. David Lewis (York South): A question to the Prime Minister arising out of his earlier statement. The statement repeats the undertaking by the government that if the Food Prices Review Board can show that there have been abuses, the government will take action. In view of the fact that the board will need some time before it can make any report, and in view of the fact that legislation also takes time, may I ask the Prime Minister whether he would consider producing legislation to give the government or the board the powers that he thinks might be needed, in order that those powers might be available should the board find that they ought to be used?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman is to some extent asking the government to legislate with a hypothetical situation in mind. In so far as the Food Prices Review Board does respond to that hypothesis and go through the various stages which I mentioned in August—the stage of identifying cases of excessive prices increases, the stage of bringing the responsible people in, of giving publicity to those increases, of asking those concerned to roll back prices voluntarily, referring the matter to the government in the absence of such voluntary compliance, the possibility open to the government of using various non-legislative or administrative powers, powers it already possesses, in order to exercise moral or other suasion against such people—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Trudeau: I am saying there are a series of steps which are hypothetical, all of which the government is prepared to take, but we do not want at the present time to introduce the type of legislation to which the hon. member is referring. However, I repeat that if these various hypotheses materialise, or appear as though they are likely to materialise, I would convey the desire and the intention of the government to bring forward such legislation.

An hon. Member: Ten o'clock!

Oral Questions

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, I often wish I could make a little speech on these questions such as the person replying is able to make. I will put it in terms of the time-honoured phrase "In view of". In view of the fact that there has already been factual information about changes in prices on the shelves which would clearly indicate excessive price increases, and in view of the fact that legislation which gives some power to roll back prices will frequently prevent something from happening, and having in mind the fact that this might easily have an influence on people to refrain from increasing prices unjustifiably, and in view of the fact that the Prime Minister—

● (1740)

Mr. Speaker: Order, please; I will recognize the hon. member. I am sure both the hon. member for York South and the Prime Minister will recognize that this is really a debate during the question period, and I would hope that questions can be asked in a more brief form.

Mr. Lewis: May I now put the question?

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, I merely rise on a point of order to suggest to you that this kind of business of the coalition might more appropriately be taken up in caucus.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: I suggest to hon. members that we are in a difficult situation in relation to time. Perhaps the hon. member for York South could now ask his question, to which there might be a brief answer, after which the Chair will recognize the right hon. member for Prince Albert.

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, based on the premise I suggested to the Prime Minister, I should like to ask whether he would want to reconsider his position and produce the necessary legislation to give the government or the board the power to control prices in given areas in order to avoid the difficulty that his own recitation has suggested?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, my recitation could be summed up by saying there are many measures which could be taken now, and indeed the fact that one such incident is before the courts for prosecution should be an indication to the hon. member that there is power to act and that action is being taken against those who use unfair practices.

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INDIAN AFFAIRS

INTERROGATION OF MEMBER CONCERNING MISSING FILE—INQUIRY AS TO MINISTER'S ACTIONS

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, my question originates from the matter raised by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands. Having been in this House for many years, it is my feeling that what was suggested by her today involves a most shocking matter. I would ask first the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development whether he or his department made any complaint concerning this alleged document,