

Oral Questions

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the National Farm Products Marketing Council held hearings last year in respect of whether there should be a broiler marketing agency for Canada. Hearings were held and views were expressed. The council then proceeded with a draft agreement, but the agreement has gone no further. I think that is probably because of the inquiry into the national egg marketing agency called CEMA. I am not prepared to go ahead at this time until there is more federal authority, or until more federal authority can be vested in such an agency because I do not see how it could properly be run without it. The fact that there is a surplus of broiler chickens in storage has nothing to do with any national marketing program. These provincial marketing boards run their own systems at the present time. Such a federal or national agency would require a proper supply management program, and that would have to be put into effect before I would sign any agreement that required a federal authority as a signatory.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the minister whether, in the absence of a national agreement, he proposes to carry out his responsibilities as the Minister of Agriculture for Canada, in meeting with his provincial counterparts to see whether a plan can be devised to get these chickens out of cold storage to be used as part of our foreign aid program, or put on the market to the advantage of the Canadian consumer?

Mr. Whelan: Mr. Speaker, I would say that the poultry producers have a certain cost involved in the production of poultry, and if society as a whole wants to put the poultry on the market or into some foreign aid program, that would be the job of society as a whole. Society as a whole should have the total authority for putting them into foreign aid or on the market. There is no sign of waste. We have investigated the storage facilities in which these broilers are stored at the present time and I am told there is no chance of waste at the present time. I am also told that producers are voluntarily cutting back on production. This is a free wheeling type of operation and there is no real federal jurisdiction or control in respect of production at the present time.

* * *

BILINGUALISM

PETITION FROM QUEBEC PROTESTANT SCHOOL BOARDS
ASKING FOR REFERENCE OF BILL 22 TO SUPREME COURT—
GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Rod Blaker (Lachine-Lakeshore): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Acting Prime Minister. Will he confirm that the Governor General and the Privy Council, through the office of the Prime Minister, have received a petition from the Quebec Association of Protestant School Boards, containing some 47,000 signatures, asking the government to refer Quebec's bill 22 to the Supreme Court of Canada and, if so, what is the intention of the government in response to this petition and request?

● (1440)

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that such a petition has been received. It will of course be studied, as it deserves to be, by the cabinet. I can only say by way of answer that on the questions of policy the Prime Minister has indicated on certain occasions the general attitude the government would take in these matters, namely, that disallowance is a procedure which has not been in effect for many years, and we are most reluctant to employ it, and also that if there were to be a private action against bill 22, the government might be disposed to participate. These questions will all be considered in the light of the petition which has been presented.

* * *

ENERGY

SYNCRUDE PROJECT—REQUEST FOR INVESTIGATION OF COST
BY COMMITTEE

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. In view of the vast amount of federal funds committed to the Syncrude project, and considering as well that the cost estimate given to the public and hon. members of the House escalated from \$2 billion to \$2.9 billion, I wonder if the minister would agree, prior to the government signing a final set of contracts on the project, to the establishment of a special committee of the House to investigate the commitments of the government and all costs related to the Syncrude project with a view to reporting back to this House prior to any signing of final contracts by the government.

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): With relation to the allegations made last week by the hon. member's colleague about a cost escalation, I would advise that the \$900 million alleged escalation is made up of a \$226 million escalation in the cost of the utility plant, which is not the responsibility of the Syncrude partners but of the government of Alberta; of mortgage financing for housing of \$100 million, which again is the responsibility of the province of Alberta; of \$500 million interest during construction which, because it is all financed by equity funds, is not relevant; and the sum of approximately \$30 million in relation to saline water disposal anticipated in part under the contingency fund already provided for.

The estimated costs are still estimated at the level of \$2 billion. There will be in the final supplementary estimates coming forward an application for a supplementary estimate of appropriation for this, which would provide an initial forum, at least, where we could have a discussion of the details of the transaction which I personally would welcome.