

Mr. Cosgrove: We know that the industry has bounced back from a very difficult time. We know that there is strength in the number of starts in the industry. They have risen from 125,000 a year ago to an expected 180,000 starts this year. By all standards that is only some 20,000 below what was expected to be built by anyone who objectively studied the market. Therefore the protestations that there is this crisis has to be put in the perspective, number one, of an industry that has rebounded from a difficult point of view, and put in the perspective of a continuing difficult affordability problem for many Canadians. We are aware of that and we are addressing that problem.

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PUBLIC SERVICE

INCREASE IN SALARIES OF EMPLOYEES AT DEPUTY MINISTER LEVEL

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, after that expression of deep concern for the ordinary Canadian, I would like to ask the President of the Treasury Board a related question. The average worker's income this year for the fourth year in a row in real dollars will actually decline. Could the minister explain to the House how the government can possibly justify an increase in salary of up to 26 per cent for the top civil servant mandarins at the deputy minister level, whose average income now as a result of this increase will be \$80,000 a year?

● (1425)

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, I am glad the hon. member for Oshawa has raised this matter which was the subject of some very misleading comment in the press today. The government has given a 9.5 per cent increase to the executive group. This is happening at the same time as the implementation of the new management category. That category in fact was approved by Treasury Board and brought forward to cabinet, and the approval took place in February. The entire cost of that reclassification transfer from the executive group to the new management category was estimated as something in the neighbourhood of \$500,000. Based on the total payroll of about \$150 million, that gives you some idea of the magnitude of a percentage increase across the board. But to speak in terms of 26 per cent is utter nonsense.

Mr. Broadbent: Madam Speaker, it is not utter nonsense at all. The minister has just indicated a certain percentage increase which, when complemented with the change in categories, adds up to exactly what I talked about, a 26 per cent increase. This means that the people at the very top end of the pay schedule in Canada in many cases are getting an increase which exceeds the pay of the average worker in the civil service. That is the sort of situation which is completely unjustifiable to anyone who has a sense of fairness.

Oral Questions

Since the minister is providing up to \$13,000 per year increases for certain categories of Canadians, how can the government conceivably do this at a time when it is doing nothing in terms of mortgages, in terms of energy costs, or in terms of tax breaks for the ordinary Canadian family?

Mr. Johnston: Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to answer the first part of that question. The hon. member is engaging in arithmetic acrobatics of the kind usually practised by the hon. member for York-Peel. The fact is, Madam Speaker, that I challenge the hon. member for Oshawa to point to any examples of 26 per cent increases. He is confusing the new rate structures which are taking place and the classification which is taking place with the 9.5 per cent increase, the general increase approved across the board, which I might add is considerably less than the 10.4 per cent general increase in settlements in the public service last year.

REQUEST FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF FAIR PRICES COMMISSION

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, the sophistry of the minister will convince no one who is not a backbencher in the Liberal party, and everyone in the country knows that. I would like to ask the minister if he will deal with the second part of the question. There are a lot of Canadians out there who are poor and suffering from inflation. Let me ask him one specific question. There is one act the government could take which would help the average Canadian, and that is to establish, for example, a fair prices commission with the authority to investigate price increases and roll them back when they are unfair and not justified. Will the minister take steps now to establish such a board which could be of concrete benefit to the average worker, instead of helping those who do not need help, which is the underlying policy of the Liberal party at this time?

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, the hon. member for Oshawa also seems to be confused in respect of my portfolio responsibilities. That is not a question which should be addressed to the President of the Treasury Board. But I can repeat, Madam Speaker, we are all mystified by this large number of public servants who received these 26 per cent increases. I would be very pleased if the hon. member would name them for my benefit.

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● (1430)

CONSUMER AFFAIRS

DECISION BY CANADIAN EGG MARKETING AGENCY TO KILL HENS

Mr. Geoff Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, and it has to do with this disturbing and unfortunate headline: "Hens will die to keep egg prices high". By its own admission CEMA has over-estimated consumer