

Oral Questions

Mr. Sharp: Anyone who has looked into the question of the best basis for the negotiation of labour contracts knows that this is a subject upon which there can be legitimate differences of view. The Minister of Finance was not endorsing this concept for universal application; he was saying there was something to be said for it, and there is.

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● (1430)

THE CANADIAN ECONOMY

INFLATION—DATE FOR ARRIVING AT CONSENSUS ON METHODS TO COMBAT—POSSIBLE DESIGNATION OF MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR PROGRAM

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I must say it is sad for a Leader of the Opposition to see a Minister of Finance undermined when he is operating under such difficult conditions as this. I take it that the Acting Prime Minister has rejected the statement of policy made by the Minister of Finance in the House on January 28.

In view of the explanation given by the Minister of Finance the other day as to why the process of reaching a consensus has been delayed, which is partly because he and other ministers involved have been busy with other responsibilities, I should like to ask the Acting Prime Minister whether he is prepared to give the House the time period within which the government will report to the House regarding this effort to achieve a consensus, which has been put off; and in view of its importance and the apparent distraction of ministers involved with other duties, will the government delegate or designate one minister as being responsible for carrying out this program and giving it the highest priority?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, these consultations are continuing. I do not think the suggestion of the Leader of the Opposition would have the effect of expediting the process. I think it is highly desirable that a number of ministers should be involved and that the government itself, through the Prime Minister, should take the responsibility. When these consultations have reached the point where there is something useful to report regarding the explorations that have taken place, there will be a report to the House.

Mr. Stanfield: A final supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Do I take it that the Acting Prime Minister is refusing to give a date within which the government will report on this matter that was in the Speech from the Throne and which has been dragging along now for quite a number of months?

Mr. Sharp: I do not think it would be desirable to fix the date, Mr. Speaker. I think the most important point about these explorations is that we should try to reach a consensus among the people who are participating. If we fix a time by which we are supposed to report a consensus, it is my view that it would inhibit the process.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Grenville-Carleton.

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

Mr. Coates: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege at this time. I have just had provided to me an answer to question No. 1,296. This is the first opportunity I have had to rise since being made aware of the reply to the question, and I understand this is the avenue I should follow. I raise this question because—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I understand the hon. member is reserving his right to raise a question of privilege at the first available opportunity, but I wonder whether it would be agreeable to him to wait until the conclusion of the question period before raising his question of privilege. I understand his concern that if he waited until the end of the question period it might be asserted that he had not raised it at the first available opportunity.

Mr. Coates: That would be satisfactory to me, Mr. Speaker.

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PUBLIC SERVICE

GENERAL LABOUR AND TRADES GROUP—POSSIBLE SUBMISSION OF INCOMES GUIDELINES TO UNION AND SHORTENING OF CONTRACT PERIOD

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the President of the Treasury Board and arises out of the obvious split between the President of the Privy Council and the Minister of Finance respecting COLA clauses as they apply to the public service. In view of this difference of view, is the government contemplating any across the board incomes guidelines or a program that would be flexible regarding lower paid groups in the economy that have fallen significantly behind? I have in mind particularly the GLT group. Does the matter of comparability of wages for this group and similar workers in the private sector fit within the terms of reference of the government's objectives on a consensus?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (President of Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, in the public service we try to reach agreement with unions through negotiations. Our objective is to provide civil servants with salaries comparable to those received by people carrying out similar duties in the private sector. I think that with such a policy it is possible to achieve the government's objectives.

[English]

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In view of the obvious failure on the part of the government to impress upon the GLT's this situation, in view of the bankruptcy of policy on the part of the government respecting the lower paid employees in the public service—which all members of the GLT group are—and particularly in view of the fact that one union member is reported at noon today to have said that if the government would shorten its contract period from two years to one some talking point might be arrived at and there would be a new chance for agreement, would the government indicate whether it will do this in order that