

Inquiries of the Ministry

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I would be very much prepared to discuss this with the minister as soon as he returns.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Bell: In two weeks.

Mr. Trudeau: If hon. members do not want an answer—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

• (1130)

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Don't be such a baby. Get up.

Mr. Muir: I thought the baby was at home.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Four or five or more members are seeking an opportunity to ask supplementary questions. We should try to proceed in an orderly fashion. The hon. member for York South.

Mr. David Lewis (York South): My question is directed to the Prime Minister. In view of the fact reports indicate that the Minister of Manpower and Immigration is unfortunately ill and will be away for some two weeks or more—I hope not more—and in view of the fact this issue of the payment of unemployment insurance benefits is a very real one for a good many thousands of people, because 1 per cent at the present level of unemployment involves a great many Canadians, may I ask the Prime Minister whether he could not immediately set up the committee and refer the subject to it, particularly since the Minister of Manpower and Immigration said in the press release to which the parliamentary secretary referred that he would be very glad to come to the committee and discuss the matter with its members? I ask the Prime Minister whether this could not be done today instead of being delayed for two weeks.

Mr. Trudeau: The minister did indeed indicate that that was his desire and that it would be his hope that as soon as the estimates are examined by the standing committee he would appear. I realize that this might take a few days, but if the opposition parties are prepared to continue changing our traditions perhaps we could shorten the debate on the Speech from the Throne to one or two days and then go to the estimates right away.

Mr. Baldwin: We should change the government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a supplementary question.

The right hon. Prime Minister has just said that he does not expect a solution before the sittings of the committee concerned. In a letter dated January 26, 1972, the Minister of Labour stated that those problems would be solved within ten days and that a solution would be reached within 72 hours in all other cases. That did not happen.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the right hon. Prime Minister whether in establishing a special committee of the House he intends to examine the administration of those cheques in order to decentralize that system to ensure a more personal and more efficient service?

Mr. Trudeau: On the facts I disagree with the hon. member, Mr. Speaker. If he knows about some specific cases he might submit them to the minister and see whether in fact a solution can be reached within 48 hours.

As to the hon. member's suggestion, I just proposed to all opposition parties, including the Social Credit party, to shorten the debate on the Speech from the Throne and to deal with the estimates now so as to consider that item.

Mr. Fortin: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister suggests that I should submit the cases that I have in mind, but the problem extends beyond this fact. I have already submitted over 400 cases, from my constituency alone. So I should like to put the same question to him again on the understanding that I shall forward to him at once a petition from unemployed constituents of Lotbinière who object to this inhuman system.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Prince Edward-Hastings.

Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Hastings): My supplementary question is for the Prime Minister. In view of the fact that the Minister of Manpower and Immigration stated to me four weeks ago today that this was a deplorable situation and assured me that it would be corrected within eight days, does the Prime Minister not consider that his assertion that he will discuss this matter in some two weeks when the minister is expected to return to the House is a disgraceful affront to the unemployed people of this country?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

DELAYS IN PAYMENT OF BENEFITS—REIMBURSEMENT OF PROVINCES FOR WELFARE EXPENDITURES

Mr. John Lundrigan (Gander-Twillingate): I would like to ask the right hon. Prime Minister whether, in view of the fact that considerable sums of money have to be expended by provincial treasuries in welfare payments because of the delays in payment of unemployment insurance benefits, procedures have been worked out with the provinces to reimburse them and whether these procedures are acceptable to the provincial governments?

Am I communicating through this sound system, Mr. Speaker, or is the Prime Minister listening to some kind of radio joke program or some television rebroadcast? The question I am asking does not seem to get a response from the Prime Minister. May I repeat my question. I ask the Prime Minister whether, in view of the fact that considerable sums of money have to be expended by the provinces in welfare payments because of the lengthy delays in the payment of unemployment insurance benefits, appropriate and acceptable arrangements have been made with the provinces to reimburse them, and have the provinces accepted these arrangements?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): As the hon. member knows, the federal government does pay 50 per cent of all welfare payments under CAP.