

CONSUMER AFFAIRS

PROTECTION OF CONSUMERS AGAINST RAPID INCREASES IN COST OF LIVING

Miss Aideen Nicholson (Trinity): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, I will direct my question to the Prime Minister.

In view of the statements by the governor of the Bank of Canada that the prospects for economic activity and employment in the months ahead are less than ideal, and in view of the fact that the year-on-year rate of increase in the consumer price index has now reached 9.6 per cent, even with the lull in the rising price of food, can the Prime Minister say whether his government is considering any special measures to protect consumers with low and moderate incomes against rapid increases in the cost of the necessities of life?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Prime Minister): Yes, Mr. Speaker, without getting specific as to the measures which are being considered, I can assure the hon. member that such measures are being considered, with the goal in mind of trying to ease the particular burden of price increases upon lower income Canadians.

An hon. Member: Give us some examples.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Davenport.

Mr. Caccia: Mr. Speaker, my question has just been answered.

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HEALTH AND WELFARE

INCREASE IN INTEREST RATE—EFFECT ON DISADVANTAGED PERSONS

Mr. Jim Fleming (York West): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Health and Welfare: it falls in line with the further increase in interest rates.

As a result of this steady increase in the interest rate, has the minister ordered a study of the impact of those increases on the poor, the working poor and those on social assistance? If he has done so, has he brought those studies to the attention of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and the governor of the Bank of Canada? If he has not, why not?

Hon. David Crombie (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, the effects of interest rates, and indeed economic conditions generally, of course, are always of concern to me and my ministry with respect to the effect on low income Canadians. As a consequence, that is why the provinces have particular roles to play when it affects those sectors of the population, the people at the low income level.

In November we will be holding a preliminary meeting, and later on a general meeting, with respect to all matters relating to the welfare part of the ministry. At that time the effects of

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these conditions will be dealt with not only by me but also by other ministers of the provinces.

Mr. Fleming: Mr. Speaker, can I ask the minister whether he has discussed with his colleagues in cabinet, or in any other forum, or whether he has been asked by them, to consider the impact of the increase in interest rates? In other words, in his responsibility for health and welfare and all the implications of that, had his advice been sought by the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister before those interest rates were increased?

Mr. Crombie: Of course, the responsibility in that regard is my own. So my own response to it, Mr. Speaker, was to bring it to their attention, which I did.

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[Translation]

ENERGY

PROPANE GAS SHORTAGE FOR DRYING AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Paul-André Massé (Saint-Jean): Mr. Speaker, my question is addressed to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. In view of the fact that some propane gas retailers in the Montreal area are now experiencing difficulties in getting their supplies from the refiners, and in view of the fact that it seems that the supplies they were entitled to are being diverted towards the United States and that because of this situation some farmers are unable to dry their crops, will the minister tell the House if he intends to make representations to the refineries so that eastern retailers, and in particular those of Quebec, are supplied on a priority basis, thereby enabling farmers to save their crops?

[English]

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the hon. member on what is apparently his first question, and to tell him that in fact the matter has been raised concerning a shortage in terms of propane. There have been discussions with the National Energy Board, which establishes the level of propane exports.

Members of the propane industry now are indicating that the problem is essentially one of transportation logistics. Sufficient propane is available, but difficulty has been experienced in lining up the tank cars to move the propane. The board now understands that assistance from a variety of other propane suppliers will alleviate the situation and reduce the problems with respect to the supply of propane.

[Translation]

Mr. Massé: Mr. Speaker, I wish to ask a supplementary.

Could the minister give the House the assurance that there is no link between the percentage increase in export sales of