

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh! Explain.

Mr. Jones: However, membership on committees is subject to the vagaries of the party whips, and the purpose of this bill is to amend the Senate and House of Commons Act to provide that independent members or those not associated with any recognized party shall be entitled to membership on at least two standing committees.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the hon. member shall have leave to introduce the bill? I hope that is not construed as an offer that the House cannot refuse!

Motion agreed to, bill read the first time and ordered to be printed.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICE

GRAIN INSPECTORS STRIKE—REQUEST FOR REPORT ON PROGRESS OF NEGOTIATIONS

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I wish to put a question to the President of the Treasury Board.

In answer to a question asked a few days ago, the minister indicated that grain inspectors had the right to strike and he expressed the hope that an agreement would be reached by normal means. Is the minister now in a position to announce that indeed such an agreement has been reached?

Hon. Jean Chrétien (President of the Treasury Board): No, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

GRAIN INSPECTORS STRIKE—ADEQUACY OF SUPPLIES IN EASTERN CANADA THIS WINTER

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I have a further question for the minister in charge of the Wheat Board, but perhaps the Prime Minister can give me the information. In view of the strike and the absence of any report of a concrete nature from the President of the Treasury Board, and in view of reports abroad that this means a shortage of grain in the east for milling and other purposes, can the Prime Minister tell the House whether his government has had an examination of inventories conducted and that he can assure the House there will be sufficient grain in eastern Canada this winter to meet the needs both for human and animal consumption?

[Translation]

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, of course this matter deeply concerns the government, and the minister in particular. We discussed it this morning, he and I, and we will continue to do so during the course of the day. As far as the exact inventory to

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which the Leader of the Opposition referred, it is obvious that that depends on the assumptions considered, namely whether the strike will last any length of time or not.

[English]

Mr. Stanfield: The Prime Minister has stated to the House that no inventory has been taken, but his answer depends on certain hypotheses. In view of the fact that the government has substantially created this problem itself, does not the Prime Minister feel under any obligation to give the House and the people of the country some assurance that there will be no shortage this winter? Finally, may I ask the Prime Minister whether he has been able to create a mess like this without even trying?

GRAIN INSPECTORS STRIKE—USE OF OCEANGOING VESSELS ON GREAT LAKES TO TRANSPORT GRAIN TO EASTERN CANADA

Mr. Bill Jarvis (Perth-Wilmot): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the President of the Treasury Board and it arises out of the fact that as of midnight last night there were approximately 80 oceangoing vessels above the port of St. Lambert and 63 above Port Waller, all of which must be out of the Seaway system by two weeks from today.

In view of this fact that there are currently numerous ocean vessels in the Seaway system capable of transporting grain to eastern terminals before the closure of the system, can the minister assure the House that these vessels will in fact be utilized to alleviate the supply situation in eastern Canada, and that they will not be allowed to leave the system empty of grain cargo?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, all these vessels are not scheduled to carry grain and, according to the events, we will see what use we can make of them.

[English]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Perth-Wilmot on a final supplementary.

GRAIN INSPECTORS STRIKE—CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR TRANSPORTING GRAIN TO EASTERN CANADA

Mr. Bill Jarvis (Perth-Wilmot): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of Transport I will address my supplementary to the minister responsible for the Wheat Board. It is estimated that a ship is capable of carrying up to one million bushels of grain per run, while a boxcar can transport only 2,500 to 3,000 bushels. In view of the fact it now appears that if government action is not taken immediately to end the grain inspectors' strike, the seaway will in fact close and domestic grain supplies will be dependent upon rail transport, will the minister reveal the contingency plans which the Minister of Transport indicated he would be preparing to ensure that there are grain supplies in Eastern Canada for the upcoming winter, especially since this is a matter directly related to the public interest?