

Oral Questions

Mr. Hees: The answer is that the government does not have the guts. It is as simple as that.

INCREASE IN FOOD PRICES—POLICY OF CONSUMER
AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT TO COUNTERACT

Mr. Allan Lawrence (Northumberland-Durham): Mr. Speaker, since we cannot get anything out of the Prime Minister or the Minister of Finance, I should like to direct my question to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, and I stress the word "consumer". In light of the very real crisis in respect of food prices, can the minister announce today any specific government policy to counteract the fact that today the Canadian housewife is having to spend \$1.10 for every dollar she paid last year for food?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: You are wrong.

Hon. Herb Gray (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, even though the hon. gentleman is a newcomer to the House I am sure he realizes that any government policy to be announced will be announced formally on behalf of the government in the usual way.

Mr. Hees: Wow! Isn't that a policy? Have we ever got a policy now.

Mr. Fairweather: We don't even get a weather report from this minister.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Fairweather: At least Turner gives us a weather report.

Mr. Hees: At least give us something.

Mr. Crouse: There are three blind monkeys over there.

Mr. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the same minister. Even if he is an oldtimer in the House, surely he knows that ministers of the Crown should be responsible for announcing policy.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lawrence: Can the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs today announce the policy of his department in respect of food prices?

Mr. Gray: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that the hon. gentleman was so busy phrasing his next question that he did not hear my previous answer.

Mr. Hees: He did not miss a thing; there was no answer.

Mr. Nielsen: What an arrogant bunch!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. If the hon. member wishes to ask a supplementary question he will be recognized for this purpose, and the Chair will then recognize the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre on a further supplementary.

[Mr. Hees.]

Mr. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, I think we are entitled to a simple yes or no answer. Therefore I merely repeat the question in the hope that the minister will give an answer.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. As the hon. member knows, he has the right to ask a question but according to the rules there is no obligation on the part of the minister to reply.

Mr. Lawrence: If he does not know the answer, I guess that is it.

COST OF LIVING INCREASE—ESCALATION OF PENSION
PAYMENTS BY SAME AMOUNT

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, may I direct a supplementary question to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. In view of the serious effect of rising living costs on pensioners and in view of the fact that on January 24 the President of the Treasury Board said that any action to raise or remove the ceiling from the escalation of pensions of retired civil servants would be related to the taking of similar action in respect of the Canada Pension Plan, can the Minister of National Health and Welfare say whether this matter will receive immediate attention, namely, the escalation of Canada Pension Plan pensions at least by the full amount of the rise in the cost of living?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, amendments to the Canada Pension Plan must have the previous concurrence of at least two-thirds of the provinces with two-thirds of the population. We have already had a meeting between officials of the federal government and officials of the provinces at which various proposals have been discussed and considered. The view of the provincial officials was that they wanted any change to wait for the broader review that has been discussed in the field of social security. Despite the representations of the federal government, we have been unable as yet to obtain the concurrence of the necessary provinces in such changes.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In view of the delay that seems to be in prospect in this area, will the President of the Treasury Board take action on the matter I referred to on January 24 and will the Minister of Transport make sure that railway pensions are properly escalated? In other words, will steps be taken so that all pensions will escalate not just by 2 per cent but by the actual rise in the cost of living?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Before pursuing this matter with further supplementaries the Chair will recognize the hon. member for Shefford.