

Oral Questions

the minister if this is not one of the reasons they walked out and what he is going to do about it?

Hon. Jean Marchand (Minister of Transport): No, Mr. Speaker. If the House wants me to discuss the problem, I can do it.

An hon. Member: Just keep the airport open.

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): Just bring back the fire-fighters? Why don't you do that?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

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CONSUMER AFFAIRS**ACTION TO LOWER RETAIL PRICES OF SO-CALLED CHEAP CUTS OF BEEF—FREQUENCY OF REPORTS BY FOOD PRICES REVIEW BOARD**

Mr. Terry Grier (Toronto-Lakeshore): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and it arises from reports that retail beef prices, particularly those of the formerly least expensive cuts of beef, have risen to an alarmingly high level. Is the minister satisfied that the increase in the prices of these so-called cheap cuts of beef is justified, and is he planning any discussions with the packers to see whether this trend can be reversed?

Hon. Herb Gray (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I think that what we need is the kind of definitive information that I expect will be coming from the Food Prices Review Board study of beef price margins very shortly. It is on the basis of that that we will decide what further action is necessary.

Mr. Grier: In view of the minister's reliance on the Food Prices Review Board for statistical information on the movement of food prices, I should like to ask him whether consideration is being given to altering the instructions to that board to ensure that their reports on the movement of food prices are issued more frequently than once every three months—say once a week.

Mr. Gray: It is my understanding of their present terms of reference that, in addition to the quarterly reports on trends in food prices, the most recent of which was issued on March 22 and which indicated on the basis of information currently available to them that consumer prices for beef seemed to be going downward, the board has the authority to issue reports as frequently as it sees fit on any subject pertaining to food prices.

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INDUSTRY**LAY-OFFS OF EMPLOYEES BY GENERAL INSTRUMENT CORPORATION, SYDNEY, N.S.—GOVERNMENT ACTION**

Mr. Robert Muir (Cape Breton-The Sydneys): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce and he is very familiar with the

[Mr. Whittaker.]

subject matter. We have discussed it in the House and outside it. It concerns the disastrous lay-offs of employees at the Sydney plant of General Instrument Corporation which have reduced the number of employees from approximately 1,000 to less than 400, and the meetings that were held by officials of his department, Industrial Estates Limited and General Instrument Corporation in Boston. Has he any progress report or anything to report with regard to doing something to correct these disastrous lay-offs and have people rehired?

Hon. Alastair Gillespie (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure that I can report any major progress. There have been discussions with both the parent corporation and the corporation mentioned by the hon. member. The reason for the lay-offs, as I understand it, is twofold: first, the company has suffered multimillion dollar losses in recent years and, second, the United States automobile market is in a depressed state. My department has been meeting with officials with respect to seeing whether GAAP, the General Adjustment Assistance Program, might be of use to the company in these circumstances.

Mr. Muir: Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion. Would the minister have his officials investigate this very serious situation and ascertain whether he as Minister of Regional Economic Expansion can do something in the area to develop that region?

Mr. Gillespie: We are most concerned about this situation and we will do everything we can to assist the company to become viable so that those on lay-off can be returned to their jobs.

Mr. Muir: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Chair will recognize the hon. member for a supplementary and will then return to the hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore who I believe has a supplementary to his previous question and supplementary.

Mr. Muir: I thank the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce for his further interest but my question was directed to the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion. Since he is in charge of the very specific problem of regional development and as the work force of the company has been reduced disastrously, what is the minister prepared to do to develop the region that is affected by this lay-off?

Hon. Donald C. Jamieson (Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Mr. Speaker, I have already been advised and have been in touch with officials of the province and also officials of the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce with regard to the viability of the existing operation. As my colleague, the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce, has said, in so far as alternative forms of employment or alternative utilization of the plant are concerned, we will be happy to look into that if it is determined that something along those lines might be possible.