

Oral Questions

the strike that the unions have now embarked upon is a legal strike?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I have not addressed a question of that kind to the Minister of Justice or to any official who might have a legal opinion. All I know is that the right to strike has not been officially questioned, and I think we should accept it that the union has the right to call a legal strike. I think this is the question that has been put to me directly and it is the one I have attempted to answer.

Mr. Dinsdale: A further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, which I will direct to the Solicitor General. In view of numerous charges made in the press about irregularities in the voting procedure, and in view of the statement made in Windsor today, which should have been made in the House, to the effect that the Postmaster General has asked the Solicitor General, or has asked the RCMP through the Solicitor General, to investigate wire-tapping on his telephone, what action is the Solicitor General taking in this regard?

Hon. Warren Allmand (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, it is possible that the Postmaster General approached the RCMP directly, but I have not been advised of that. I will check into it.

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THE CANADIAN ECONOMY

DECISION OF QUEBEC TO REDUCE AMOUNT OF INCREASE IN MINIMUM WAGE—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Finance. In view of the minister's express concern that the package of economic proposals that the government has presented to the House will benefit the average and low income people, notwithstanding the fact that there is nothing in it directly for them, I should like to ask the minister whether a decision by the Quebec government yesterday not to proceed with an increase in the minimum wage, which in that province was scheduled to go up next month to \$2.92, but instead to increase it next January simply to \$2.86 instead of \$2.92, is in the minister's view in the spirit of the guidelines to which the minister has referred a number of times?

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I would just correct the statement of the hon. gentleman. Any measure that protects the position of those not in a position by economic power to continue to get their fair share of the growth of Canada's economy is obviously one that is in their favour, and this applies directly to those of low income. I have not had an opportunity to speak to provincial officials generally since our meeting of a week ago Monday. I will have the opportunity tomorrow and the next day, and undoubtedly this is among other questions that will arise. I would not comment before I have had an opportunity to discuss the matter.

Mr. Broadbent: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Since more than 1,700,000 Canadians living in the province of Quebec are directly affected by this negative decision by the premier of Quebec, I should like to ask the minister, when he meets with the finance ministers of all the prov-

[Mr. Dinsdale.]

inces and particularly with the minister of the province of Quebec, whether he would make it clear that it is not the government's intention that this approach should be taken to minimum wages at the provincial level. In fact, would he positively encourage the provincial premiers to increase the minimum wages in their provinces?

● (1420)

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, I think we would want to talk particularly about the situation of those in lower income groups, not only in Quebec but across Canada.

SUGGESTED INCREASE IN FEDERAL MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I have a final supplementary question in an area that is the direct responsibility of the government. Given the fact that the federal wage in 1970 was 55 per cent of the average manufacturing wage in Canada and that for 1975 this has dropped to a mere 51 per cent of the average manufacturing wage in this country, which means that low-income federal employees or people under federal jurisdiction have been getting a declining share of the economic pie, would the minister take direct action to the benefit of such low-income Canadians, within the government's responsibility, by raising the federal minimum wage?

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I am obliged to the hon. gentleman who has given a very good example of the way in which those on low incomes suffer when those with economic power can force up their own compensation. I would certainly be prepared to look at the level of compensation within the federal public service area to see whether people have suffered because of the exercise of economic power by others.

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[Translation]

MANPOWER

MEASURES TO PROTECT CANADIAN LUMBERMEN WORKING IN MAINE

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I should like to put a question to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration.

As lumbermen, Canadian and American, have been confronting each other for several days now at the boundary between the state of Maine and the province of Quebec, right across from the riding of Bellechasse, on matters concerning wage and working conditions of the Canadians working in the States, as the situation seems to be deteriorating from day to day, and as I have been requested to ask the Minister of Manpower whether he has been advised of the situation, can he tell us what steps he intends to take to ensure that Canadian workers are protected as they should be, and that they can continue to work for the American lumber industry?

[English]

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, if I understood the question