

promised me earlier in the week, on Tuesday, that he would consult with the Minister of Finance to see whether he could make a statement, and give us the timing thereof, with regard to the consensus program upon which a report was promised before Christmas and before the end of February. I asked the Prime Minister whether he would make a statement to the House before the Easter recess, which is now very close, concerning what the government is seeking a consensus on and the progress that is being made. Can the Prime Minister give me an assurance he will make a comprehensive statement on this program which is considered to be of such importance to the government before we adjourn for Easter?

**Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, I did raise the matter with the Minister of Finance. The situation is that there will be no position set down before Easter. If there is to be one it would be a repetition of the very thorough and on-going statement the minister made in respect of the taxation measure some weeks ago.

**Mr. Stanfield:** Mr. Speaker, I believe the statement was made when the bill was before the committee. In view of the fact that any statements made by the Minister of Finance or by the Government House Leader have been of a general nature and members of the House and the people of the country are completely in the dark concerning what it is the government is seeking a consensus about, would the Prime Minister tell us when he will be prepared to make a statement which is not a general statement of the sort which has been given which means nothing. When will he be prepared to give a statement to the House concerning the contents of the consensus program?

**Mr. Trudeau:** I have not yet determined the date, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Stanfield:** Mr. Speaker, I want to keep within the rules of the House and keep my temper if I may. In view of the emphasis given this program in the Speech from the Throne, and in view of the repeated postponements and no new information given about it, how does the Prime Minister expect the Leader of the Opposition or anyone in the opposition to sit calmly by and receive nothing but evasive answers from the Prime Minister? The Prime Minister smiles. Is it the intention of the Prime Minister simply to stonewall all questions on this subject and bide time, or is it his intention finally after many, many months to give the government and the country at least a little bit of the leadership which he promised in the last campaign?

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Trudeau:** Well, Mr. Speaker, in all sincerity may I say I do not expect the Leader of the Opposition to sit idly by and keep his temper. I fully realize that he is doing his job in trying to get a statement from the government on this particular subject. My smile during the question had nothing to do with his concern but with the big smile I saw on the face of the hon. member opposite when someone yelled "shame". I thought this was part of the rhetoric, part of the game. I smiled, but I still believe that the question asked by the Leader of the Opposition is a very serious one. He will realize that on the government side

### Oral Questions

we are engaged in a very difficult and delicate operation of trying to keep the inflation rate down by seeking a consensus. In our judgment, this is not the time to make any precise statements about the progress that we believe we are making. I respect the Leader of the Opposition for asking the question. I believe there is a certain amount of rhetoric involved in it, as indeed there is in my answer.

● (1210)

#### INFLATION—REQUEST FOR REPORT ON PROGRESS IN REACHING CONSENSUS BETWEEN MANAGEMENT AND LABOUR

**Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Hastings):** My supplementary question is directed to the Prime Minister. On Monday I asked him if he would report on the progress made toward reaching a consensus between management and labour with the object in mind of controlling inflation, and he replied at the time that he was viewing the matter with cautious optimism. I wonder now if this cautious optimism will enable him in the near future to repeat once again that deathless phrase which he uttered in January of 1970, namely, "we've got inflation licked".

**Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister):** This is a good example of what I call a rhetorical question which is not seeking any information, and is quite different from the question of the Leader of the Opposition.

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[Translation]

### TRANSPORT

#### REQUEST FOR IMPROVED RAILWAY SERVICE FOR NORTHWEST QUEBEC—MINISTER'S POSITION

**Mr. Armand Caouette (Villeneuve):** Mr. Speaker, I should like to put a question to the Minister of Transport.

Can he tell the House whether he is aware that northwest Quebec merchants have decided to boycott the CN services to protest against the reply the minister gave to a question I put to him on March 10 last about the slowness of CN deliveries in their area and, if so, can he tell us what he intends to do to meet the very legitimate request of the people of that part of Quebec concerning the delays in CN freight services?

**Hon. Jean Marchand (Minister of Transport):** Mr. Speaker, I have already been in touch with the CN and I trust we will be able to get a better service for the people of northwest Quebec.

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[English]

### NORTHERN AFFAIRS

#### MERCURY POISONING OF NATIVES IN ENGLISH RIVER AREA—GOVERNMENT MEASURES TO RECTIFY—KNOWLEDGE OF JAPANESE STUDY

**Mr. Stuart Leggatt (New Westminster):** Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and it concerns the English river system in Ontario and in the area of Kenora. Would