

Oral Questions

AGRICULTURE

FARM MACHINERY—MASSEY-FERGUSON PROFITS—
INVESTIGATION BY MINISTER—POSSIBLE ACTION

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): My question, Mr. Speaker, is directed to the Minister of Agriculture. In view of the fact that the profits of the Massey-Ferguson farm machinery company increased by more than 340 per cent last year, may I ask whether the minister is investigating this unjustified rise in profits and can he tell us whether he is considering recommending some form of price control in a situation of this kind?

Mr. Baldwin: In due course.

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): I was not aware that their profit was that high. As I stated earlier in the House, we have been meeting with ambassadors and trade representatives of other countries that are in a position to supply farm machinery in an attempt to work out agreements with them or to help them with their sales in this country so that these other companies will be faced with some competition.

Mr. Nystrom: The minister failed to answer my question. Is he considering the establishment of a prices review board or some form of price control in a situation such as I have described where the increase in profit amounts to 340 per cent?

Mr. Whelan: We will certainly consider every avenue open to us to make them accept a realistic mark-up when selling machinery so that they do not take advantage of agricultural producers.

* * *

INCOME TAX

REQUEST FOR EXTENSION OF OFFICE HOURS TO ASSIST
TAXPAYERS SEEKING INFORMATION

Mr. Joseph-Philippe Guay (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of National Revenue. Bearing in mind the deadline for income tax returns, which is coming up shortly, and with reference to my question of February 8, reported in *Hansard* at page 1076, with regard to the possibility of extending the office hours of income tax offices throughout the country in order to assist taxpayers seeking information in connection with income tax returns, may I ask whether the minister has now had time in which to consider this matter?

Hon. Robert Stanbury (Minister of National Revenue): Yes, Mr. Speaker. For the benefit of people unable to use the inquiry service during the day because they are at work, we are extending both the local and long-distance toll-free telephone inquiry service until 8 p.m. every Monday and Tuesday until April 30.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Is the minister contemplating engaging Fred Davis and the rest of his staff at another million dollars to publicize this fact?

[Mr. Allmand.]

Mr. Nielsen: I rise on a question of privilege, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps hon. members have heard this question of privilege before, but I raise it again because it brings into question the whole practice of this place in entertaining questions by parliamentary secretaries to ministers.

I can understand backbenchers seeking legitimate information. If they cannot get it on the telephone, they may seek to get it in the House. But parliamentary secretaries, in my submission, are in a far different position. They are assistants to ministers, in this case, to the Minister of Transport, and there is a clear line of communication available between the parliamentary secretary and the Minister of National Revenue through which this information could have been easily obtained.

It is unfair to opposition members whose chief responsibility it is to seek information in this House for parliamentary secretaries to abuse the question period in this way. I submit that Your Honour should take this whole matter under consideration and at some later time advise members of the House whether you feel it is fitting and proper for parliamentary secretaries or, for that matter, ministers, to be asking each other questions.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, I should like to say first of all that I have been elected in just the same way as the hon. member from Yukon.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: And by a lot more voters.

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): And, Mr. Speaker, may I say to you that it is very difficult for a member of this side of the House to sit here daily listening to some of the nonsensical questions posed from the other side.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): At least we ask questions that make sense and benefit Canadians. Also, I am sure, because we are all equal as Members of Parliament, we are entitled to have questions recorded in *Hansard* on the same basis as members on the other side. The time has come for this to be recognized. Regardless of whether we are parliamentary secretaries or not we should be able to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, when we have important questions to ask pertaining not only to our constituencies but to Canadians throughout the country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. This matter was raised by way of a question of privilege by the hon. member for Yukon and I have no hesitation in ruling that while it may be a point of order which is of interest to all hon. members, and certainly to the Chair, it is not a question of privilege.

I am not entirely in agreement with what is suggested either by the hon. member for Yukon or by the hon. member for St. Boniface. The hon. member for St. Boniface suggests—and I suppose in theory he is right—that members on the government side have the same rights as members of the opposition in asking questions. Yet that is