

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, July 20, 1978

Time: 10:00 a.m.

OPENING PRAYER by Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER, Hon. Harry E. Graham (Birtle-Russell): Presenting Petitions . . . Reading and Receiving Petitions . . . Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS AND TABLING OF REPORTS

MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. GERALD W. J. MERCIER (Osborne): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table Plan Winnipeg, a report developed by the Tri-Level Committee which I indicated I would table a few days ago.

MR. SPEAKER: Notices of Motion . . . Introduction of Bills.

ORAL QUESTIONS

MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

MR. EDWARD SCHREYER (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Finance, in light of the statement issued yesterday by the Conference Board of Canada, making a relatively gloomy prognosis of the Canadian economy for the next year and a-half or so, can the Minister of Finance say whether at the most recent meeting of Ministers of Finance, whether, as a result of the discussions on the economy at that conference, any consensus of view emanated that was at all corresponding to the Conference Board's statement of yesterday.

MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable Minister of Finance.

HON. DONALD W. CRAIK (Riel): Mr. Speaker, the Conference Board predictions are one of the type of predictions that are taken as being one of the guidelines or indicators. The Department of Finance in Ottawa has disagreed with them about six months ago in their predictions and I don't know what the Federal Department of Finance might do in this particular case but they appear to disagree. In this instance, the Federal Minister of Finance, at the Finance Ministers' Conference was still adamant that the real growth of the GNP in the current year would be of the order of 4.5 percent. He had initially said 5.0 percent. The more recent indicators, by the Conference Board and others, have been closer to 3.0 percent and the Minister of Finance, federally, is still adamant on the position that the real growth in 1978 will be closer to 4.5 percent. So it appeared that the Federal Department of Finance is not in agreement with the predictions, at least for the current year, of the Conference Board.

That's about as far as we can indicate. The unemployment rate that's being predicted is predicted to be roughly the same in 1979 as in 1978, Canadawide. What the predictions are regionally, I can't give any further indication.

MR. SCHREYER: Mr. Speaker, I would direct a question to the Minister of Labour. Occasionally on a subject matter, if it's deemed important enough, even if it lies under the administrative purview of the other level of government, representations can and sometimes are made by one level of government to the other. Can the Minister of Labour say whether, with respect to the ruling of last week by the Unemployment Insurance Commission which effectively prohibits unemployment insurance benefits to those locked out as opposed to those on strike in a labour dispute, can the Minister say whether the Department of Labour or her office will be making any representations to the Unemployment Insurance Commission or the Federal Minister of Labour?

MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable Minister of Labour.

HON. NORMA L. PRICE (Assiniboia): I don't know, Mr. Speaker, how much the Provincial Government can do when it's a federal matter. I would like to tell the Leader of the Opposition that I have a meeting with some union people in my office at 11 o'clock this morning.

MR. SCHREYER: Well I realize, Mr. Speaker, it's a federal matter which explains the preface to my question. It is open to the Minister of Labour, I'm not asking her for an answer now necessarily, but given that it is open to her to make representation on any matter of public policy, even under federal purview, can she say whether it is being considered to make a representation in this connection to the federal authorities?

MRS. PRICE: Mr. Speaker, I'm prepared to discuss it with the men this morning and to see how we will proceed with making a representation.

MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable Meer for Inkster.

MR. SIDNEY GREEN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct a question to the First Minister. In view of the fact that there have been several unfortunate incidents, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the public taking of land and negotiating before expropriation, some that have been referred to very recently and some that the Honourable First Minister is aware of dating back to the 1965 Legislature, would the government consider a policy of, when they require land to expropriate, which doesn't preclude negotiations but that negotiations would be commenced after the expropriation proceedings were started, so that the value of the land would be fixed as at the day of expropriation?

MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable First Minister.

HON. STERLING R. LYON, Premier (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for Inkster touches on a problem which all governments find to be a very vexed one. I don't think that any administration working with the best of goodwill, with whatever legislation there is, is going to emerge satisfying the two interests that have to be satisfied, namely on the one hand the landowner whose land is being taken, whose interests are quite important, and secondly, and equally important, the public interest to ensure that the taxpayer is not paying an unwarranted amount of money for land that is needed for public purposes.

I say to my honourable friend quite frankly that I welcome any suggestions that he has that would assist in developing government approaches on expropriation generally, whether it be through Crown corporations or by the government itself, realizing that notwithstanding all of the suggestions that he might make or that I might make to bear upon that situation, that we will still end up with an imperfect situation. But I say to him quite sincerely, that I welcome any suggestions of the kind that he has made and I am sure that the Ministers of the Treasury Bench would as well in order that we can better ensure, as much as it is humanly possible, that the two interests which are diametrically opposed are both served by the confiscation that government is required to take from time to time of private property.

MR. GREEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable First Minister and I want to concur with him that this type of problem has been a problem no matter who has been the government and I don't say this for any partisan reasons, but I ask the Minister, in dealing with this letter in Cabinet, to see whether or not I am not correct that attempts to be softer or to negotiate have often resulted in more trouble. Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Minister to see whether I am not correct that the attempt to try to soften or negotiate the proceedings have often resulted in more trouble than they have saved, and that expropriation being a normal public remedy doesn't preclude the negotiations and reasonable transactions concluded after the expropriation has commenced.

MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for Fort Rouge.

MR. LLOYD AXWORTHY: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Consumer Affairs. Last night in the Law Amendments Committee Hearings some very serious allegations were made by one of the witnesses appearing concerning abuses of the Rent Review Program that were conducted by certain officers of that agency. I wonder if the Minister intends now to investigate those charges to determine whether there was any serious abuses and whether the decisions that were made in respect to it will be altered or the guidelines changed as a result of those kinds of charges and allegations that were made.

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MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable Minister of Consumer Affairs.

HON. EDWARD MCGILL (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, the member refers to statements made by a witness last evening that were not specifically identifying particular landlords or particular actions. If the witness wishes to advise me of the specifics of the cases to which he refers, I would be very pleased to request an investigation and to obtain facts on those allegations.

MR. AXWORTHY: The Minister was in attendance at the committee, as well as others, and I would ask why, when those charges were made, he did not seek out or have his officials seek out that particular witness so as to get the specifics from the case, and does he now intend to do that so that the actual charges and the builders and officials who were involved in it can be specifically designated and therefore the proper inquiry be taken to see if that is an isolated incident or whether it is reflected of a larger pattern of decisions now being made by the Rent Review Agency?

MR. MCGILL: Mr. Speaker, to the Member for Fort Rouge, I have had a number of meetings with landlords or people who represent landlords, or tenants, or people who represent tenants, who claim to be aggrieved by decisions made by members of the Rent Review Agency and the Rent Stabilization Board, and they have given me specific details of their complaints and I have undertaken to investigate them and to request additional details. But, Mr. Speaker, until the person who gave this information last evening comes to me with a specific complaint I am not about to, in a general way, accuse members of the Rent Review Agency and others of lack of judgment. The charges have to be specific ones and when they are made, I will investigate.

MR. AXWORTHY: Well, Mr. Speaker, just in response I would raise the question with the Minister that concerning that wasn't just simply a matter of a misjudgment but also a fundamental breaking of the rules or the regulations that define the role of the Rent Review Agency, it would appear to me a case that should be responded to more than just in a passive way.

I would also like to ask him at the same time whether the information that was transferred by a member of the Conservative caucus at that same meeting that there is to be additional hirings and staffing in the Rent Review Agency in the immediate future or in fact taking place now is in fact true, and can the Minister confirm exactly what are the intentions now in terms of changing the personnel or adding to the personnel of the Rent Review Agency in preparation for the introduction of a decontrol phase?

MR. MCGILL: Mr. Speaker, nothing has changed in that respect which would be different from those explanations which I gave during consideration of the Estimates and the questions that were raised with respect to the adequacy of staffing in the Rent Review Agency. And I indicated, Mr. Speaker, to the House and to the member that when additional staffing was needed and when recommendations for additional staffing were received from the senior rent review officer, they would be dealt with. And it was our intention to provide the necessary staffing as and when required, and nothing has changed with respect to that policy.

Mr. Speaker, it is not the practice in this House, as far as I am aware, to make a ministerial statement every time additional staff is taken on in any one of the government departments.

MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for Transcona.

MR. WILSON PARASIUK: Mr. Speaker, my questions are directed to the Minister of Consumer Affairs responsible for the Rent Control Program, as well. I would like to ask the Minister if he would reconsider his decision not to investigate those allegations in the light of the fact that we are just at the stage in review of Bill No. 62 where that information would be pertinent for us to determine whether Bill 62 should be further amended to prevent loopholes, such as the ones indicated yesterday, from continuing to exist.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, order please. May I suggest to the honourable member that questions of that nature are out of order because they are dealing with a matter which has not yet been reported to the House. The Honourable Member for Transcona.

MR. PARASIUK: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, this is both public information and committee information, and since we were not in a position last night to ask the Minister questions on this matter in the committee, I would like the Minister to look into this matter so that when we get into the committee, probably the final committee stage, we would be in a position to determine whether this material is pertinent.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. May I give the honourable member Citation 171 of Beauchesne's (hh) which reads, "It is improper to seek information about proceedings in a committee which has not yet made its report to the House."

The Honourable Member for Transcona with another question.

MR. PARASIUK: Mr. Speaker, in the light of allegations reported in the press and on the radio this morning . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please, order please, order please. May I read to the honourable member Citation 171(e), "It is improper to enquire whether statements made in a newspaper are true."

The Honourable Member for Transcona.

MR. PARASIUK: Mr. Speaker, I would like you to take a look at that ruling in the light of the fact that throughout this sitting you have allowed questions of that nature and then in this instance you are not allowing it.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please, order please. If the honourable member wishes to challenge the ruling of the Chair, he knows the procedure he can follow.

The Honourable Member for Transcona.

MR. PARASIUK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs undertook to determine whether in fact there are rent rebates outstanding greater than \$318,000, which he indicated the other day.

MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable Minister of Consumer Affairs.

MR. MCGILL: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Transcona is referring to a question that I believe he placed to me on Monday or Tuesday, and he asked if the figures of some \$318,000 was the total amount of orders still outstanding in respect to rent rebates, or whether in fact this amount of unpaid orders included pending court decisions. - Mr. Speaker, I can tell the member that the figure of \$318,344.01 is the total of unpaid orders according to the Board's record. It includes orders owing by two landlords who challenged the Board's decisions in court, but they did not place funds in escrow, and the court did not issue a staying order on the Board's decisions, pending hearing of the landlords' application.

Aside from these two, Mr. Speaker, the total that I have given, the figure, does not include amounts owing by other landlords who challenged the Board's decisions and placed money in escrow pending court rulings. The actual amount of money owing to tenants by these landlords would have to be calculated. No figure for the total amount owing by these landlords can be quoted until such time as the total amount of the actual refunds has been calculated.

MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for The Pas.

MR. RONALD MCBRYDE: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to address a question to the Minister of Public Works. I wonder if the Minister could confirm that in order to complete the landscaping and cement work at the new school in Cormorant, whether his department has brought in, besides a supervisor, eight labourers from southern Manitoba, into a community where there is high unemployment?

MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable Minister of Public Works.

HON. HARRY J. ENNS (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, I would have to take that question as notice.

MR. MCBRYDE: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Minister could indicate, or take as notice, whether or not the Conservative government has changed the policy of the New Democratic Party government, the policy that preference will be given to hiring northern residents, especially people in remote communities where there is high unemployment.

MR. MCBRYDE: Well, Mr. Speaker, a final question. I wonder if it's part of this government's efficiency in administration effort to bring in labourers from southern Manitoba, having to pay over \$30 a day for accommodation for them at the lodge, at the same time they're paying out provincial welfare to persons unemployed in the community.

MR. SPEAKER: Orders of the Day. The Honourable Member for Fort Rouge.

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MR. LLOYD AXWORTHY: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Agriculture. In the past the Minister announced that the government intends to sell off the Water Services Board warehouse in Transcona that provides services to farmers in the province. Could the Minister now confirm that bids had been received on that warehouse but that the government, as of the closing date yesterday, did not take up any of those bids, and does that now mean that the warehouse will be totally closed and not be available to anybody for any service?

MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

HON. JAMES E. DOWNEY (Arthur): Mr. Speaker, at this particular time the decision has been made not to accept any bids. I think it is further under review, but it is our intent to close it.

MR. AXWORTHY: A supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Considering that the personnel that have operated that service have received notices of termination that are dated tomorrow, does that mean that the warehouse will not be in operation as of Monday, and can the Minister indicate where farmers in the province can receive an alternative service if the service is to be totally shut down?

MR. DOWNEY: Mr. Speaker, I would say the farmers will have the opportunity to deal in their local communities and purchase the goods they need from the local suppliers in their small towns throughout rural Manitoba.

MR. AXWORTHY: Mr. Speaker, in light of that, could the Minister give us a reason why the government was not prepared to sell that warehouse to a private owner that would have continued the service and recovered proper amounts of capital and equity back to the people of Manitoba for the inventory that is presently in the warehouse, rather than losing the money which it now appears they intend to do?

MR. DOWNEY: Mr. Speaker, the matter is under consideration at this time. However, the facility that the warehouse is operating in is a Department of Public Works facility, so there is no plan to sell that particular facility at this time and it is under review.

MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for Fort Rouge with a fourth question.

MR. AXWORTHY: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the warehouse itself is part of the large and vacant stock now being held by the Department of Public Works' can the Minister indicate what happens to the inventory of equipment that is contained in that warehouse? Does the government intend to sell that off, or simply keep it in storage for a later day?

MR. DOWNEY: As I said, Mr. Speaker, it's under review. I would imagine the intent would be to sell it off at a fair and reasonable price.

MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

MR. SCHREYER: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to direct a question to the Attorney-General which flows from an exchange of questions and answers between the Member for Inkster and the Minister of Mines. With respect to the decision in Court of Queen's Bench which quashes the expropriation order that is part of the agreement preliminary to the construction of the Vermilion Dam, given that the province is now in a position of being unable or incompetent, unable to meet the conditions laid out in the federal-provincial agreement, can the Attorney-General say whether it is now under active consideration as to whether to appeal or take alternative action, and can he say whether he has received any instructions — or requests, rather — from the Government of Canada as to what ensuing action should now be taken in the light of the Queen's Bench decision?

MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable Attorney-General.

MR. MERCIER: Mr. Speaker, I have received no communications from the federal authorities, but the matter is under review.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. Before we proceed, at this particular time I would like to introduce to honourable members a guest in my gallery in the person of Mr. Vince Leah, who was recently honoured on the steps of the Legislature here earlier today. Uncle Vince, as he is commonly known, is well known in sporting circles throughout the Province of Manitoba, and indeed, further than that and it is a pleasure today to have him here, and on behalf of all the members, we welcome you

here this morning.

Before we proceed with the first order of business, the Honourable Member for Churchill.

ORDERS OF THE DAY — ORDER FOR RETURN

ORDER NO. 57: On Motion of Mr. Cowan, Order for Return.

THAT an Order of the House do issue for a return showing the following:

1. The names of the companies which have received employment grants under the Private Sector Youth Employment Program;
2. The number of employees for which each company has received employment grants; and
3. The total amount received in employment grants by each company.

MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable Minister of Education. uHON. KEITH A. COSENS (Gimli): Mr. Speaker, we find this Order acceptable.

MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable Minister of Finance.

MR. CRAIK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was going to reply to a question, but I'll hold it until the next sitting.

MR. SPEAKER: The Honourable Government House Leader.

HON. WARNER H. JORGENSON (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I suggest that you recess the House now and we proceed into Committee of Law Amendments to consider those bills that have been referred to at Committee clause-by-clause and that the House reconvene at the call of the Chair.

MR. SPEAKER: The House is accordingly recessed to return at the call of the Chair.

Time: 12:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The hour being 12:30, the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 2:30 this afternoon.