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**THIRTY-SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
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VERBATIM REPORT

THURSDAY, MARCH 4, 1976

SPEAKER; THE HONOURABLE GERALD RYAN OTTENHEIMER

The House met at 3:00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair.

MR. SPEAKER: It is my duty now according to Section (150) of the Election Act to inform the House, or to communicate to the House, two matters. One, that on the thirtieth of January of this year I received a certificate of that date signed by Aruthur S. Mifflin, Chief Justice of the Trial Division of the Supreme Court, and John W. Mahoney, Judge of the Trial Division of the Supreme Court, which certified that the election in the electoral district of Exploits in the general election of members to serve in the House of Assembly in the Province of Newfoundland held on the sixteenth day of September, 1975, was void. And, according to the Act, I then sent a warrant to the clerk of the Executive Council to the following effects: one, that all necessary proceedings for altering the return of the election in the electoral district of Exploits be undertaken; and, two, that there be undertaken as well the necessary measures for the issuing of a writ for a new election in the said district.

The second matter is that on the twenty-fourth of February of this year a certificate was received bearing that date signed by Aruthur S. Mifflin, Chief Justice of the Trial Division of the Supreme Court of Newfoundland, and John W. Mahoney, Judge of the Trial Division of the Supreme Court of Newfoundland, certifying that the election in the electoral district of Bonavista North in the general election of members to serve in the House of Assembly in the Province of Newfoundland held on the sixteenth day of September was void. I sent a warrant to the clerk of the Executive Council to the same effect. I should also point out to the House that the office of Deputy Chairman of Committees is now vacant.

I wish to welcome to the gallery on behalf of all members of the House of Assembly the town manager and three councillors from the town of Channel-Port aux Basques.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS:

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister without Portfolio.

HON. R. WELLS: Mr. Speaker, I wish at this time to make a statement on

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MR. WELLS:

the oil refinery at Come By Chance. The government is deeply concerned, as are all people of this Province, for the future of the 484 men and women employed at the refinery and the hundreds more whose incomes will be affected by the closure.

MR. WELLS: The major concern of government is that every possible step be taken to reopen the refinery at the earliest opportunity and to have it operate as a sound commercial enterprise providing jobs for Newfoundlanders and an increase in the provincial economy.

The Newfoundland Government has at all times given every possible assistance to this enterprise. However, international conditions and factors entirely beyond our influence or control have brought about its insolvency and closure. An interim receiver has been appointed and a hearing will take place in the Supreme Court on Monday next to determine whether a trustee in bankruptcy should be appointed. Whatever the outcome we will take every step open to us to ensure that this refinery will operate in the future, and our chief concern will continue to be for the employees.

Mr. Speaker, we welcome today to the public galleries of this hon. House over 100 men from the refinery who have come to St. John's to express their concern, and that of their families, to government and in particular -

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear! Hear!

MR. WELLS: - and in particular, Mr. Speaker, to raise with us the matter of severance pay. We have met with representatives of the groups concerned and later this afternoon we will have a full discussion of these and other matters.

In the meantime we are informed by the interim receiver that on Monday, March 1st., Provincial Refining Company Limited notified all employees that their employment would terminate on March 15th., 1976. The receiver has been working with the company's senior management and the unions on the orderly shut-down and moth-balling of the plant so that the assets can be safely and effectively preserved. Of the present work force of 484 it is expected that 198 will be required until April 14th., 107 will be required until July 14th., and following that, 35 employees on a continuing caretaker basis until such time as start-up plans are begun.

We are assured that all wages will be paid in full and in priority

MR. WELLS: to other creditors, including secured creditors. Full vacation allowances will also be paid to all the refinery workers in accordance with the collective agreement. Those who are rehired by the receiver will, of course, receive normal rates of pay and benefits.

A joint consultative committee has been formed which includes the union, management, Canada Manpower and the Department of Industrial Development to assist those laid off to find alternate employment. We are assured that every effort will be made by all concerned to ensure that the refinery will be properly protected to enable prospective purchasers or others to reactivate it with a minimum of difficulty.

On the matter of severance pay, the legal position is not yet clear and government will ensure that legal advice is available to the employees concerned to enable them to determine if they have a legal right to severance pay, and if they do have such a right how it should be pursued.

It is appropriate at this time to make clear to all concerned that Provincial Refining Company is a private company and not a government owned or run corporation. It is now in the hands of the interim receiver and government will make every effort to see that affected persons have access to the best counselling and advice available. In order that the issues of the refinery should be fully understood, and in order that there should be the fullest possible public information and debate on the reasons for the closing, the efforts to resolve current difficulties and the possibilities of its reopening, government has decided to ask the House of Assembly to suspend normal business so that a special debate can take place on this matter of urgent public importance. Because today is March 4th. and the hearing of the bankruptcy petition takes place on Monday, March 8th., and because the outcome of that hearing will be important to the debate, it is our wish to commence the debate after the 8th. of March.

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Tape No. 890

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MR. WELLS: I am sure, Mr. Speaker, that we will have the co-
operation of members of this hon. House in scheduling this debate
which is of grave concern to all Newfoundlanders.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

HON. E. M. ROBERTS (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, under the rules of the House, of course, I am not allowed, nor is anybody allowed to debate at this time the points made by the minister, the hon. gentleman from Kilbride (Mr. Wells) in his ministerial statement. I am allowed only a brief comment or two, I think, in the way the rules read.

Let me say first of all, Sir, that we welcome the news that the government are prepared to debate this issue. We think they have come a little late to the party in view of the fact that this has gone on for two or three weeks and the House has been in suspense when it could have met at any moment. We shall debate it as quickly as we can under the rules and regulations of the House.

Let me say also that we, Sir, shall do our part to ensure that not just legal advice is given to the men and the women who work at Come By Chance on this question of severance pay. I would feel that if our legislation is defective on this we should look very seriously at the possibilities of legislating. We are a sovereign legislature within our constitutional jurisdiction and within the bounds of what is right and proper.

I would like to welcome the men who have come from Come By Chance. I think every Newfoundlander shares their concern, and every Newfoundlander shares their determination to get to the bottom of this situation and above all to see what can be done to keep open that refinery, or if it must close - and I for one do not accept that it must close - if it must close that it close for a short a period as possible and that the effects of the closure be cushioned as far as possible.

I am not allowed to debate it, Sir, but let me say that I think the government's attitude on this has been - I can give an analogy - that when the government heard that the patient was sick, the patient being Come By Chance, instead of sending for the doctor they

Mr. Roberts.

immediately sent for the undertaker. They have washed their hands of this thing, stood by and almost wished it.

MR. WELLS: To a point of order.

MR. ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker! Mr. Speaker!

MR. SPEAKER: Order! A point of order has been raised. Order, please!

MR. WELLS: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. member well knows that this is not a subject matter for debate at this time. The government have put forward gladly the suggestion and the wish and the intention to debate the matter. This is turning the matter, instead of something serious deserving full debate in this House, this is turning it into a joke and a farce by these sort of remarks.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear! Hear!

MR. ROBERTS: To that point of order, Sir. The hon. gentleman of all should know better. Sir, this House has stood aside for three weeks because this government was too busy jaunting hither and yonder around the world to bring us together to allow us to debate it.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. ROBERTS: And now, Mr. Speaker, to bring us together with this holier than thou attitude.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The point of order has been raised with reference to debate on the ministerial statement. As the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows and stated himself, he is not permitted to debate it.

MR. ROBERTS: I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I had not intended nor had I knowingly wandered into the realm of debate, but I do feel, Sir, that the government's attitude has been one of sending for an undertaker instead of sending for a doctor with relation to this whole Come By Chance situation.

Mr. Roberts.

Now let me finish by saying, Mr. Speaker, that I hope the gentlemen in the galleries, the men from Come By Chance, will be able to stay for awhile this afternoon because I would hope there will be questions asked to the ministry in this matter. I would hope there will be answers given. The questions have been asked before, Sir. The answers have not been given up until now. Mr. Speaker, I look forward with great eagerness as do my colleagues to a debate on this subject.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. member for Twillingate.

HON. J. R. SMALLWOOD: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the announcement from the Leader of the House that after Monday, sometime after Monday, in other words after the hearing in the Supreme Court of Newfoundland, this House will be given the opportunity to debate this very, very, very serious problem. I welcome the announcement, and I look forward eagerly to the opportunity to take part in that debate as I took part in another great debate in this Chamber to establish the refinery at Come By Chance in the first place. I hope the debate next week will not be a funeral and will not be to bury the refinery.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SMALLWOOD: I agree with the government's decision not to ask the House to debate this matter until after the hearing in the Supreme Court on Monday. I think it would be improper to debate these matters while these matters are the subject of judicial review and decision. That is as much as I can agree with the government on. I disagree most heartily and most vehemently with their whole conduct of this affair up to the present time, but the time to say that and the time to give the reasons will be when the debate is held. In my view this is one of the great tragedies to come upon Newfoundland since Confederation, twenty-six, twenty-seven years ago.

MR. SMALLWOOD:

The hearts of all our people go out today, and in recent days, to the 500 Newfoundlanders who have been earning a very good living in the refinery. Our hearts go out to them. They need more, however, than just our sympathy. But at least they have our sympathy. And our hearts go out to something bigger even than the 500 Newfoundlanders who are involved. Our hearts go out in sadness and almost despair over the thought of the disappearance of what gave promise of being one of the greatest industrial and economic developments that our Island home ever saw in 500 years. The going down of the refinery, and therefore the disappearance of the dream, may be only for a short time, pray God, only for a short time, the disappearance of the dream of a great petrochemical industry, the dream of an oil refinery two or three times as big as the one that is there now to be followed by an even greater petrochemical industry. That is a terrible, almost an unendurable tragedy for Newfoundland.

I look forward to the debate and I hope that it will be a thorough-going debate. I hope that we can debate it without rancor, without hatred, without prejudice but also with realism and truth. Let us try in the debate to get to the bottom of what brought all this about and who, if anyone, is to blame.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. NEARY: Mr. Speaker, under the rules of the House is it permissible for me to have a few comments?

MR. SPEAKER: Under the rules of the House the only persons who may make brief comments on a ministerial statement are the Leader of the Opposition or the leader of a recognized group or someone speaking on their behalf. The hon. gentleman is not the leader of a group.

MR. SMALLWOOD: Not a group in the House but outside the House, a very ardent one.

MR. SPEAKER: But as the hon. gentleman knows it is a group in the House which he must lead.

PRESENTING PETITIONS:

MR. NEARY: Mr. Speaker -

MR. SPEAKER: I am sorry. Is the hon. gentleman up on a point of order?

MR. NEARY: No, petitions, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER: Presenting petitions.

MR. NEARY: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to present, Sir, 193 petitions from people all over Newfoundland and Labrador who are protesting any increase in electrical rates in this Province, either by the government's own creature, Newfoundland Hydro, or by the Newfoundland Light and Power Company. These petitions, Sir, are from not only various communities throughout the Province but are also from businesses, industries, petitions that were circulated on the job and so forth. I have petitions from Corner Brook, Grand Falls, St. John's area, Kilbride, Pouch Cove, Admiral's Cove, Lethbridge, Hillview in Trinity Bay, Elliston North, Bloomfield, Swift Current, Badger's Quay, Charleston, Port aux Basques, Plate Cove West, Coley's Point, Bay Roberts, Eastport Peninsula, Grand Falls, Twillingate, Durrell, Bay of Islands district, River Head, St. Mary's Bay, Brownsdale, Burnt Point, Fortune, Deer Lake area, Frenchman's Cove, Carbonear, Clarenville, Torbay, Blaketown, Sunnyside, Parsons Pond, Stephenville Crossing, Islington, Heart's Delight, Northwest Brook, Red Bay in Labrador, Port Blandford, Cupids, Spaniard's Bay, Dunfield, Mount Pearl, Gillams, Clarenville and area, Small Point, Milton, Burin, South River, Frenchman's Cove,

Mr. Neary:

Gander, St. Anthony, Blaketown, Topsail to Holyrood, Shoal Harbour, Southern Shore, Howley, Ramea, Campbellton, Elwood Regional High School in Deer Lake, Bishop's Falls, Dark Cove, Wesleyville, and I could go on and on, Mr. Speaker, I am not going to read the whole list. I still have several pages.

MR. SMALLWOOD: Go on.

MR. NEARY: Keep going? Gaskiers. As a matter of fact my mother was born close to that and I cannot even pronounce it Jacques Fontaine Arnold's Cove, St. Fintan's, Windsor area, Burin again, Marystown, Lamaline, Epworth, Grates Cove, Port Blandford, Dunville and area, Come By Chance, Mackinsons, all kinds from the St. John's area, and Grand Falls area, Wesleyville and so on. A total, Sir, of 193 petitions bearing the names, Mr. Speaker, and the signatures and addresses of 23,481 Newfoundlanders, 23,481, probably, Sir, -

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. NEARY: _ probably, Mr. Speaker, the largest, certainly one of the largest, and probably my hon. colleague from -

MR. SMALLWOOD: The largest was asking for prohibition in 1916.

MR. NEARY: 1916. How many -

AN HON. MEMBER: Hear, hear!

MR. NEARY: How many signatures?

MR. SMALLWOOD: Much larger than that.

MR. NEARY: Much larger.

Well, Sir, the total number of signatures and addresses on the petitions that I have before the House today to table 23,481. I also have, Mr. Speaker, down in my office, that I intend to put in a bag, a mailbag sometime in the next day or two and deliver to the Premier's office 4,000 more signatures in the form of individual letters and postcards, and telegrams, and I hope to be able to make an appointment with the Premier in the next day or two -

MR. SMALLWOOD: To get the Premier to read them all?

MR. NEARY: Well I do not know. I am going to bring them in and lay them

Mr. Neary:

on his desk and if he does not make an appointment with me I will lay them outside of his door. But just like Santa Claus, Sir, I will take this bag on my back and I will deliver the individual postcards, letters, and telegrams to the hon. the Premier's office. That will be a total, Mr. Speaker, -

PREMIER MOORES: I will open the bag and let you out.

MR. NEARY: I beg your pardon?

PREMIER MOORES: Maybe I will leave you in!

MR. NEARY: I may put the Premier in the bag, Sir, and take him down to Come By Chance with me.

SOME HON. MEMBER: Hear, hear!

MR. NEARY: Mr. Speaker, that will be a total of 27,000 Newfoundlanders who have written me voluntary. Sir, it is a spontaneous thing. It was an organized movement. There were no petitions prepared here in Confederation Building or in Ottawa and sent out to these people. These petitions were all written by the people themselves. It was not an organized movement. It was a spontaneous write-in of letters, telegrams, postcards and petitions. Twenty-seven thousand Newfoundlanders, Sir, which in my opinion represents one in four of every household in Newfoundland who are irritated with this government, who are hopping mad with this government, and who are vehemently and violently objecting to any unrealistic, unreasonable increases in electrical rates at this time. These people, Sir, who have signed these petitions feel that the increases that are asked for by the Newfoundland Hydro on behalf of the Newfoundland Government and by Newfoundland Light and Power Company are unjustified. And even though, Mr. Speaker -

MR. WELLS: Order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. WELLS: I would refer Your Honour to Standing Order No. 92 in the case of petitions, which reads, "In no case shall a member occupy more than five minutes" except by permission of the House, and permission of the House has not been granted.

MR. SPEAKER: On that point of order, the Standing Order is quite clear and the hon. gentleman has had five minutes, so it must be with the -

MR. SMALLWOOD: On a point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes.

MR. SMALLWOOD: Surely it is the sense of every hon. member, from the Premier down, on so vital a matter, even if the member get a little vehement in his presentation, on so vital a matter we allow him to have some little extra time, surely? It is not going to hurt anyone.

MR. NEARY: To that point of order, Mr. Speaker, I could present one petition at a time, Your Honour, and take five minutes for 195 petitions.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please! Order, please!

A point of order has been raised. The hon. House Leader has read the relevant Standing Order. "In no case shall a member occupy more than five minutes in so doing unless by permission of the House upon question put." So the issue as it presents itself to the Chair is quite a clear one. It is up to the House. So, therefore, I am asking whether the hon. gentleman does have the consent of the House to continue with his presentation?

MR. A.J.MURPHY: May I ask a question?

MR. SPEAKER: Is it agreed? Agreed.

MR. MURPHY: Will this preclude any other questions on Come By Chance which are to come up which I think are very delicate. We only have so much for -

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please! Order, please!

The matter before the Chair and before the House is to the following effect: The hon. gentleman has used up his five minutes, a point of order has been raised, the Standing Order is quite clear that no hon. member may go beyond the five minutes in presenting a petition unless has the permission of the House. It is my understanding that he has the permission of the House. The hon. the member for LaPoile.

MR. NEARY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I presented the petition, Sir, all at once. I could have, as Your Honour readily knows, presented 193 petitions times five minutes which would have taken the whole afternoon. I do appreciate, Sir, the unanimous agreement in the House to allow me to continue with my remarks. I do not intend to be very long, Sir.

Certainly the matter has been the subject of controversy over the last few weeks. You know, if I never said another word about it I am sure that the government, the hon. the Premier and his administration, must have gotten the message by now, unless they are completely insensitive to the real wants and needs and desires of the people. I do not think they are, Sir, because the hon. the Premier did grant a freeze, put a

MR. NEARY:

freeze on electricity rates in this Province. Newfoundland Light and Power Company has postponed the one and three-quarter per cent monthly increases that they were allowed by the Public Utilities Board last Spring. They have postponed any increases until sometime in the late Summer or early Fall. Both of these gestures, Sir, are minor victories for the people of this Province. But, Mr. Speaker, we cannot slacken off. In the middle of July or in the middle of August, Sir, when everybody is on vacation, people are not using as much electricity, businesses are not using as much electricity, everybody will lose interest in the electrical controversy and the next thing you will know the increases will be sneaked through. So we have to stay on our guard, Sir, from now until the end of December of this year, and not let us have the wool pulled over our eyes. If we do that, Sir, we deserve as Newfoundlanders to be victimized.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure on behalf of these 23,481 Newfoundlanders to present all these petitions in the House of Assembly and to ask the House to refer these petitions to the appropriate department of Government. As I indicated when I began my remarks, Sir, it certainly is the largest petition that has ever been presented since I have been in the House. I would think, Mr. Speaker, it is probably the largest petition to be presented in this House since Confederation.

MR. SMALLWOOD: Hear! Hear! Yes.

MR. NEARY: That is a correct statement according to my former colleague and the former Premier of this Province.

And, Sir, unless the administration are completely insensitive to the needs of these Newfoundlanders, Sir, and the 125,000 customers of the Newfoundland Light and Power Company, unless they are completely insensitive, they have no choice unless they want to commit political suicide but to accede to the wishes and the desires and the aspirations of these Newfoundlanders.

MR. NEARY:

I do not know if I can put it in stronger words, Sir. The petitions speak for themselves. The letters and the post cards are still pouring into my office every day. There are other petitions that I know at the moment are being circulated that will be late arriving. I will present these in the House of Assembly at a later date. I do know that the Leader of the Opposition has an organized drive on, a petition that was prepared in Confederation Building and sent out -

MR. DOODY: Which Leader is that?

MR. NEARY: - of the old line Liberal Party.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please! Order, please! I must call to the hon. gentleman's attention the first part of the same Standing Order which is Standing Order (92), the first few sentences: "Every member offering a petition to the House shall confine himself to the statement of the parties from which it comes, the number of signatures attached to it and the material allegations it contains." Now, the hon. gentleman, of course, had leave of the House to continue beyond the time period, but I did not interpret that as leave to continue beyond the restraints of that Standing Order.

MR. NEARY: Thank you, Your Honour. Now, Your Honour, I will get on and finish my few remarks and present the petitions, Sir. I would like to read you just one of all the prayers of the various petitions that I have. This one is from Grand Falls, my hon. friend's district, addressed to Mr. Stephen Neary, M.H.A., Confederation Building, St. John's, Newfoundland: "We, the undersigned, strongly protest the recent increase in electrical rates granted to the Newfoundland Light and Power Company by the Public Utilities Board. Since electrical power produced in this Province is done so by the Newfoundland Government through Newfoundland Hydro, we find it strange why we have to pay a middleman any cost for our electricity." I think that message, Sir, speaks for itself. And I hope that the petitions that I have presented today, that the message will get through to the hon. Premier and the administration and that once the three months are up that the freeze on an increase in electrical rates in this Province will continue and not just be a stopgap measure until the heat is off, until the fuss dies down and the controversy is over.

MR. NEARY:

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to present all these petitions. If the page would come down, Sir,- most of them are on the floor right now - we can pick them up between us and lay them upon the table of the House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear! Hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Mines and Energy.

HON. J.C. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, the government is very pleased, of course, to have this petition laid before the House. It confirms what is already, of course, obvious and that is that no one welcomes or likes having their energy rates increased, just as no one likes or appreciates prices increasing or taxes increasing or any other increased costs that anyone has to pay. Of course the public and people do not like any increases in the cost of energy or the cost of providing energy. The government does not like it. I do not like it and I join my voice to the 23,381 petitioners and say I support their petition and that I utterly and completely agree with them, there should be no unreasonable or unnecessary increases in hydro rates in this Province. I would just go on further to say that to date, Mr. Speaker, there have been no increases that I know of that have been unreasonable or unnecessary, since we know that any increases that have been imposed for Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro do not even recover their costs of providing the energy. Surely it cannot be unreasonable to at least try to recover your costs. Since we know that the other agencies such as Newfoundland Light and Power Company Limited have to have any rate increase approved by the Board of Commissioners of Public Utilities, an impartial, independent, quasi-judicial board which makes its rulings on well known principles and which has to make rulings on all applications by Newfoundland Light, Bowater Power and the like for any rate increases.

So we certainly, and I certainly agree 100 per cent and as long as I am in the government, Mr. Speaker, I will fight against to the death any unreasonable or unnecessary increases in hydro or energy rates generally in the Province. There will be, Mr. Speaker, many opportunities to debate this issue in this House and outside this House and all the facts will be given to the House as to what will happen to energy rates later this year. There

MR. CROSBIE:

will also be statements on that. But the House can rest assured there will be no increases in energy or hydro rates that are unreasonable or unnecessary. In the case of Newfoundland Hydro, no one is suggesting any increases in rates that will even give them their cost of providing energy to Newfoundland Light and Power during the present year. So I support

MR. CROSBIE: the petition. I welcome it. I hope that the hon. gentleman will put his other 4,000 names in and he can add my name to it. We will fight to the death against such unreasonable and unjustified increases.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear! Hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. member for Terra Nova.

MR. T. LUSH: Mr. Speaker, I too would like to support the petitions presented by the hon. member for LaPoile (Mr. Neary), and would like to congratulate him on his industry and initiative in this respect and I feel that I would be remiss in my duty as an M.H.A. if I did not come out and support these petitions.

Mr. Speaker, I have my own petitions to present but I do not know whether there are other members who want to speak to Mr. Neary's, or what the situation would be.

AN HON. MEMBER: Go ahead with your own.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. gentleman is asking the House whether any additional person wishes to speak to the previous petition before he presents his own.

MR. LUSH: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to -

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. member for Twillingate.

MR. SMALLWOOD: I believe that there is not even one hon. member in the Chamber who does not support the petition. We all do, unanimously, universally, heartily and enthusiastically, even the Cromwell of that side who just spoke, all of us here in this House

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. member for Terra Nova.

MR. ROBERTS: Remember what happened to Cromwell.

MR. LUSH: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present petitions on behalf of several communities in my own district and in the district of Bonavista North. These petitions represent several thousand people and these petitions come from Glovertown, Jamestown, Brooklyn, Portland, Centreville, Wareham, and Trinity. And also protests, or petitions from the Council of Happy Adventure.

Mr. Speaker, the prayer of these petitions is that, and I read the

MR. LUSH: one petition, "that we humbly showeth that we protest in the strongest possible terms against the government's decision to increase the electricity rates charged by the government owned corporation by 40 per cent, making a total increase of more than 100 per cent in twelve months, that we realize that this increase will be passed on to us whether we buy our power from the Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro Corporation or whether we buy it from the Newfoundland Light and Power Company, that many people will suffer hardship if this increase is permitted and we therefore petition the government not to permit this increase and your petitions, as in duty bound, will ever pray."

Mr. Speaker, I want to say of course that I wholeheartedly endorse this petition and I believe that, as was mentioned by the hon. member from LaPoile (Mr. Neary), that if the government is sensitive to the needs of the people of this Province that they will look very seriously at this before imposing such an increase as was suggested, as was approved by Cabinet of 40 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, I will not take up further time of the House. I think the point has been made. But I ask that these petitions be placed on the table of the House and that the petition be forwarded to the appropriate department.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Mines and Energy.

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, we thank the hon. gentleman for presenting these petitions. We know that this is a very sensitive issue. I just want to point out in connection with the facts, Mr. Speaker, that last December government authorized Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro to discuss with Newfoundland Light an increase in the price for power charged by Newfoundland Hydro to Newfoundland Light to come into effect some three months later if approved by the Public Utilities Board, an increase from 9.7 mils per kilowatt hour to 13.6 mils per kilowatt hour, which amount still was estimated not to be sufficient to recover their costs on the power they supply.

The increase,

Mr. Crosbie.

if it had been approved by the Public Utilities Board, the Board of Commissioners of Public Utilities, who have to decide under the contract between Newfoundland Light and Newfoundland Hydro, have to decide the question whether the increase is reasonable and prudent, if that had been approved by the Public Utilities Commission, and if it had gone into effect the increase would have been 14 per cent to the consumers of hydro electricity from Newfoundland Light and Power and not 40 per cent. It would not have been a 40 per cent increase to the consumer of power. It was a 40 per cent increase from Newfoundland Hydro to Newfoundland Light, adopting just a mathematical approach, but such an increase would have been a 14 per cent increase at the retail level, and the government would never have authorized the Hydro to apply for anything higher. What they were authorized to apply for was a 14 per cent increase, not a 40 per cent increase to the consumer.

MR. SMALLWOOD: Nine something to thirteen something?

MR. CROSBIE: Nine point seven mills to thirteen point six and that is 40 per cent if you just want to look at that. But as to what the customer would have had to pay additional, there would have been an increase in the retail rates for hydro power to Newfoundland Light's customers of 14 per cent. In the event, Mr. Speaker, as the House knows, that matter has been arrested and a freeze instituted for three months. The government will be - thanks to the Premier, backed up and supported by all his colleagues.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROSBIE: And in fact if his colleagues had anything to do with it he would have had announced a freeze for thirty years, but he took a more common sense approach than that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we will be announcing to the House what our proposals are or what our position is on this matter within the next week or two weeks, and certainly there is going to be no

Mr. Crosbie.

40 per cent increase, certainly there is going to be no 30 per cent increase, certainly there is going to be no 20 per cent increase -

MR. NEARY: Twenty per cent.

MR. CROSBIE: - and certainly there is not even going to be now a 14 per cent increase which there would have been had the Board of Commissioners of Public Utilities approved what had been suggested by Newfoundland Hydro to Newfoundland Light. That is now in abeyance.

MR. NOLAN: How much is it?

MR. CROSBIE: We do not know how much there will be, but we will be -

MR. NOLAN: How can you say it will not be 40 per cent or 14 per cent if you do not know how much it is going to be?

MR. DOODY: Order, order, order!

MR. CROSBIE: We know, Mr. Speaker, and we can control what is asked for by Newfoundland Hydro to Newfoundland Light and Power. The government's proposals in this regard will be given to the House in the next week or two weeks. So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to clarify that point. That suggested increase, of course, is now in abeyance, but it would not have been 40 per cent. It would have been at the most 14 per cent that the customer of Newfoundland Light would have had to pay had that all gone through the Public Utilities Commission. And by the way, Mr. Speaker, I might point out that every other province in Canada you look at has the same problem. Every other province in Canada has increasing energy costs. This is not confined to Newfoundland. We are in the same boat as the ten other provinces, some of whom are worse off than we are.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

MR. ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, if I might say a word or two in support of the petition presented by the gentleman from Terra Nova (Mr. Lush), and in so doing, Sir, may I point out that it was the gentleman from Terra Nova (Mr. Lush) who discovered and who made public the fact that the

Mr. Roberts.

Cabinet had authorized this 40 per cent increase secretly. They had done it in December.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. ROBERTS: It was my colleague who properly and lawfully and with great skill ferreted out this secret increase the Cabinet had authorized, and let me point out, Mr. Speaker, that it is 40 per cent. Nobody has ever pretended that it was 40 per cent at the retail level, but as the petition says, it refers to the increase, the electricity rates charged by the government-owned corporation by 40 per cent. And as the gentleman from Twillingate (Mr. Smallwood) just mentioned, if you take 9.7 mils away from 13.6 mils per kilowatt hour, you are left with a difference of 3.9 mils and that is almost exactly to the third decimal 40 per cent. And that, Sir, coming on top of the increase imposed unilaterally, arbitrarily by the government a year ago, in April of 1975, at which time power was being sold by Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, or whatever it was then called, to the utilities for six mils, they then broke their contract, forced Newfoundland Light and Power - and Heaven knows I have no brief for Newfoundland Light and Power, but in this one at least they are the innocent middleman -

MR. ROBERTS:

forced them to accept a higher rate and then in turn they had to pass that on. Now the government are back with another bite of the apple and they are telling us it is a three month freeze. Sir, it is only, at best, a three week freeze because once my friend from Terra Nova (Mr. Lush) exposed the government's secret undertaking to force up the price of power by 40 per cent, the balloon went up with a great vengeance.

The gentleman from LaPoile (Mr. Neary) had been making quite a noise even before that about the price of power and in particular the 1.75 per cent per month cost adjustments built in under authority of the Public Utilities Board into the utilities, the utility rates. The balloon went up. There had never before been such an outpouring of outrage and concern. The Premier came back to his office long enough to overrule the cabinet. He told us, I believe, he had not been at the meeting where the decision was taken, although it had been taken in December and this was late in January, and the three month freeze, so called, was put on. But let it be known and let it be widely realized that that three month freeze, Sir, is only three weeks because the increase was not scheduled to come into effect in any event until April 1.

I support the petitions, Sir. I have one or two I would like to present myself but there will be an opportunity for that later this day. But let me say, Sir, that I support the petition presented by the gentleman from Terra Nova (Mr. Lush) as I support the petitions presented by the gentleman from LaPoile (Mr. Neary). I know that every hon. member of this House feels the same way. I think, Sir, that never have the public of this Province been as outraged and touched as deeply and as sensitively as by the government's crass, callous, secret handling, secretive handling as well as secret, of this electricity rate issue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

HON. F.D. MOORES: Mr. Speaker, in speaking to the petition, as well, I have to make a few comments because of what the Leader of the Opposition said as much as the petition itself. The fact is, Sir, that I think we all realize, and as my hon. colleague, the Minister of Mines and Energy said, there will be no unreasonable increases. But at the same time it is unfair to expect at a time when energy is such as it is in the country, and in our Province, internationally today, to expect that taxpaying people of this Province should be subsidizing the electrical users of this Province and that is what is happening now.

I think with energy increases, oil increases, with the federal government's raising of the price per barrel of oil, allowing it together with Alberta and other concerned provinces, I think obviously the cost of electricity is going to rise and energy. I think it is only fair to say, Sir, and say here - and there will be lots of opportunity to debate any increase at the time that it is done - but I think it is only fair to say at this time that there will be substantial increases in energy. I do not think there is any question about that. Not in this Province. I notice where in Nova Scotia the Premier said it may not be 100 per cent, it may be close. The fact is increases in energy is a fact of life in our nation. To play petty politics with it, Sir, is wrong and irresponsible.

MR. SMALLWOOD: It is not only our nation but every nation.

PREMIER MOORES: Every nation, of course.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. member for Twillingate.

MR. SMALLWOOD: Mr. Speaker, I support the prayer of this petition as I did the prayers of the others presented by the hon. member for LaPoile (Mr. Neary). But in doing so I have to confess to being puzzled between this 14 per cent and this 40 per cent. As I gather it now from what the Minister of Mines and Energy said, if the proposed increase had gone on through and had not been frozen, I gather from

MR. SMALLWOOD:

the actions of the Premier who is the right one to have frozen it - I did some freezing from time to time and that is one of the functions of a Premier - if he had not frozen it, if it had gone through it would have been an increase. The government, the government's agency, Hydro, would have charged Newfoundland Light and Power, a private company, an increase of 40 per cent from eight point something to nine point something to thirteen point something per kilowatt hour.

Now, if the Newfoundland Light and Power Company had passed that on to the public it would have been a 40 per cent increase on the portion that they bought from Newfoundland Hydro, obviously,

Mr. Smallwood:

obviously. But if they were to pass on only 14 per cent increase it meant that they, the private company, were absorbing the balance of the 40 per cent. Surely it had to be that. If I sell a kilowatt hour of electricity to the hon. member for Lewisporte (Mr. White) for an increase of 40 per cent over what he has been paying me up to now, I charge him 40 per cent more and he sells it to the hon. member for Burgeo (Mr. Simmons), or wherever it is, for a 14 per cent increase and then the member for Lewisporte is absorbing the difference, is he not? Is that what is happening? The Newfoundland Light and Power Company are being charged 40 per cent more but they are charging the people that they sell it to 14 per cent more. Now is that because they are required to dip into their profits?

MR. CROSBIE: No.

MR. SMALLWOOD: Well.

MR. SIMMONS: That makes sense, but not 'Crosbie' sense.

MR. CROSBIE: If they increase their rate 14 per cent -

MR. ROBERTS: That would recover the full cost of -

MR. CROSBIE: That would recover sufficient cost to pay the increase.

So -

MR. SMALLWOOD: In other words if they are charged 40 per cent and they resell it to the retail customers for 14 per cent more that brings them back in fact the 40 per cent that they were charged themselves.

MR. MURPHY: The cost.

MR. CROSBIE: Right. That would get them back enough to meet these extra costs.

AN HON. MEMBER: Caught in the middle.

MR. SMALLWOOD: Although the minister has told us -

MR. CROSBIE: Newfoundland Light.

MR. SMALLWOOD: The minister has told us something rather interesting and that is this; that the 40 per cent increased price that the government were charging the company still did not give them the cost of producing that power. In charging an increase of 40 per cent they were still losing

Mr. Smallwood:

money. Did I gather that correctly from the minister?

MR. CROSBIE: Yes. They would have lost during the year. Yes.

But it would have come close - that would be close to breaking even.

MR. SMALLWOOD: It would not be much of a loss but it would be a loss.

MR. CROSBIE: Perhaps a couple of million dollars this year.

MR. SMALLWOOD: I have to say that I am in complete agreement with the hon. the Premier when he speaks of the increasing cost of energy. A few years ago you could buy a barrel of crude oil in any of the oil countries for \$1.25 a barrel. It went to \$6, to \$8, to \$9, to \$10, to \$11, to \$12 and in some cases now it is \$14 for the same barrel of oil that you got for \$1.25 about three years ago, four years ago. And let us not think for one moment that it is going to stay at the present level. You are going to see the cost, the price of crude oil go up to \$20, \$25 a barrel. We will see it. Those of us here in this House will see that in the world because it is a diminishing thing, it is not increasing, you cannot make it increase, you can make trees grow by fertilizing them but you cannot make oil in the ground that is not there already. And so it is a diminishing resource and the price is going up and as it goes up so will go the price of electricity, no matter how it is produced whether atomic or falling water or the sun or oil, the price is going up and I am afraid that we in Newfoundland are going to have to pay through the nose.

Now what is the answer to that? I wish I knew. Does anybody know? I do not think anybody in this House knows the answer. I do not, and I confess it.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Windsor-Buchans.

MR. G. FLIGHT: Mr. Speaker, first I would add my support to the petitions that have already been presented, and I beg leave to present petitions on behalf of the Town of Windsor.

MR. NEARY: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: A point of order has been raised.

MR. NEARY: The debate, Sir, on the petition that was presented by the Member for Terra Nova is not completed yet. So it would not be in

Mr. Neary:

order at this point to present -

MR. CROSBIE: There is no debate.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please! I cannot hear the hon. gentleman.

MR. NEARY: I said the debate on the petition that was presented by the member for Terra Nova is not yet ended, Sir. There are other members. I saw the member for Bay of Islands (Mr. Woodrow) and -

MR. CROSBIE: There cannot be debate.

MR. NEARY: myself, and there may be probably other members who wish to speak on the petition. So it is not in order at this point to present another petition, Sir, while we have that particular petition from Terra Nova before the House.

MR. DOODY: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order to debate a petition?

MR. SPEAKER: On these points of order, of course there is no debate on petitions, but people may speak to various petitions. I will now ask the hon. member for Windsor-Buchans if since it appears that there are other members who wish to speak upon the previous petition if he would allow them to speak on the previous petition and then, when that is concluded, I will call on him to present his petition. However, if he wishes now to speak on the previous petition and then wait before presenting his own, that also, of course, will be quite all right.

MR. FLIGHT: I will wait.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the member for Bay of Islands.

MR. WOODROW: Mr. Speaker, while the heat is on I thought I would add some remarks to the debate. I would like first of all to congratulate the hon. member for LaPoile (Mr. Neary) for receiving such a great number of names from the various people throughout his own district and throughout the Province of Newfoundland in general.

I would like to say that I have also received a petition from just about every area in the district of the Bay of Islands which I shall be presenting within a day or two. I would like to say that I think all of us, especially the members on the government side, we are concerned, not only about the increased cost in electricity which is certainly making life a little bit more - not only a little bit, but harder for our people, especially people in areas like the Bay of Islands district where most people are living in rural areas and their incomes are not as high as those in urban places. So I want to say that I certainly - as a member of the government - am concerned about it.

MR. SMALLWOOD: The hon. gentleman is a supporter, and not a member of cabinet.

MR. WOODROW: And a supporter.

MR. SMALLWOOD: And a supporter.

MR. WOODROW: Absolutely! Absolutely!

MR. SMALLWOOD: No one ever knows. That is right!

MR. WOODROW: What I would like to say is this; the Premier has already stated that rates are going up in Nova Scotia. In fact, only a few days ago I heard the Leader of the Opposition, the hon., I think it is John Buchanan, in the Opposition in Nova Scotia - he happens to be fighting the Liberal Government in Nova Scotia about electricity - so I think, you know, it is a matter for us not to be trying to play politics in this hon. House over things which are going to affect the lives of all our people.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WOODROW: It is a serious matter. It is a matter for us to work together on and not just try to play politics on it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SMALLWOOD: Who is? Who is trying?

MR. WOODROW: Who is trying?

MR. SIMMONS: The hon. the member for the Bay of Islands (Mr. Woodrow), who else?

MR. WOODROW: Absolutely not. In fact I have been elected to this House, Sir, to help people.

AN HON. MEMBER: Hear, hear!

MR. WOODROW: And that is what I am going to try to do as long as I occupy a seat here. But if we are trying to play politics out of the fact, well, we are certainly not trying to help people.

MR. ROBERTS: Hear, hear!

MR. WOODROW: We are taking them for a ride. Our Newfoundlanders do not deserve to be taken for a ride. They deserve to be helped and, Sir, I hope all of us, in fact, not only in this particular item but in everything else, I think that we all work for the good of the people and I would like to say that sometimes the Opposition make me feel that this government have no compassion -

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please! Order, please!

MR. SIMMONS: Right on! Right on!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please! I must require the hon. gentleman to confine his remarks to the subject matter of the petition.

MR. WOODROW: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is about all I have to say, but I certainly feel that I am going to do my best to see that the rates of electricity are kept within the boundaries of reason.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear! Well said!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the member for LaPoile.

MR. NEARY: Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the prayer of the three or four or five petitions presented by the member for Terra Nova (Mr. Lush) protesting any increases in electrical rates. I support it, Sir, for the reasons that I gave earlier this afternoon when I presented a number of petitions on behalf of people all over this Province. I want to say, Sir, I was rather impressed with the remarks of the previous speaker. And that is why, Mr. Speaker, I am going to resist the temptation to get into a hassel with the Leader of the old-line Liberal Party at this particular moment of which came first, the hen or

MR. NEARY:

the egg? Who was the one that blew the whistle and who started this movement to get this protest going?

The only thing I can say, Sir, to the Leader of the Opposition is he has to get up a little earlier in the morning to get ahead of some hon. members of this House, and he has to work a little longer in the evening.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please! I must make the same observation to the hon. gentleman as I made previously and that is to require him to keep his remarks within the subject matter of the petition.

MR. NEARY: Yes, Sir. So, Mr. Speaker, the write-in

MR. NEARY: Sir, had started long, long before the official opposition got into the fray. But, Sir, I am glad they are in now, but one thing I do not want to see happen, Mr. Speaker, and that is why I am impressed with the remarks made by the member for Bay of Islands (Mr. Woodrow), I hope Sir, it will not become a political knock 'em down, drag 'em out issue, because if it does then, Mr. Speaker, you have both sides lining up, digging their heels in, and it is only the people that will suffer in the final analysis.

I think that is why, Mr. Speaker, as the Independent Liberal in this hon. House that people are looking to me because they know, Sir, that I do not have to kow-tow to any party or toe any party line. I am not wearing any party label, Sir, and that is why the people are looking to me to fight their battles because I can look at it more objectively. I can look at it -

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please! The hon. gentleman has now stayed somewhat from the subject matter of the petition.

MR. NEARY: I can look at the petition, Sir, presented by the hon. member for Terra Nova (Mr. Lush) more objectively and more realistically probably than anybody else in this hon. House. But, Mr. Speaker, I have a word of warning that I want to issue to the people of this Province, that I hope, Sir, that as a result of all these petitions that are being presented that the suggestion made by the old-line Liberal Party will not be adopted by the government, and that is to place Newfoundland Hydro under the Public Utilities Board.

The gentleman on the Public Utilities Board, Sir, may be honourable, decent, competent, responsible Newfoundlanders but they are not as sensitive to the needs of the people as the politicians are. So for God's sake, Mr. Speaker, I hope the old-line Liberal Party will not fall into that trap again of letting the government off the hook and before the freeze is over see them either pawned off on the Public Utilities Board, which is another creature of the House of Assembly, another creature of the government, really. So I hope, Sir, that the old-line Liberal Party will not pull the carpet out from under the feet of the people and that we will keep the government on the hook and keep fighting against these

MR. NEARY: increases as long as it is necessary.

MR. SPEAKER: Are there any further comments on this petition?

The hon. member for Windsor-Buchans.

MR. FLIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I would like to support the petitions that have been presented and beg leave to present four petitions of my own, or petitions that have been presented to me for presentation to this House.

A petition from Windsor, Mr. Speaker, sponsored by the Windsor Chamber of Commerce; a petition from Badger, sponsored by the Mayor of Badger; from Grand Falls, sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees; and from Corner Brook sponsored by the Canadian Union of Postal Employees.

Mr. Speaker, there is not much I can add to what has already been said or what will be said, I would presume, over the next couple of days. However, in supporting the prayer of these petitions there are a couple of thoughts that I would like to address myself to. In a public affairs programme very recently, I was lucky enough to listen to it and watch it, the hon. House Leader made an attempt to justify the increases in hydro over this past year and I suspect to soften the blow of anticipated increases. And he said in effect that the people would have to decide whether or not that we would, number one, pay for -

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please! I must draw to the hon. gentleman's attention the first part of Standing Order 92 and also Standing Order 97, "Every member offering a petition to the House shall confine himself to the statement of the parties from whom it comes, the number of signatures attached to it and the material allegations it contains." Obviously there has been a certain laxity in the literal interpretation of that, yet still the rule of relevance in petitions certainly has to apply. And specifically what I am referring to is 97 that "there shall be no debate" and the hon. gentleman was, in my opinion, beginning to debate.

MR. FLIGHT: Thank you, Sir. What I was saying, Mr. Speaker, is relevant to the prayer of the petitions, and that is that there be no further increases in hydro rates in Newfoundland. It may be said that we should pay for electricity and that the Province should not subsidize electricity. And that is the

MR. FLIGHT:

point that was made on the particular programme I am referring to. That may or may not be acceptable to the people who have the ability to keep their wages abreast of the increasing cost of living. My concern here, Mr. Speaker, is that looking at the type of increases we have had, and looking at the type of increases that we can expect, what happens to our people on fixed incomes? What happens to our people on minimum wages? It has gotten to a point where they can no longer stand it. If we accept it as having to pay for our electricity by the consumer it may or may not be acceptable that the people whose ability to keep their income abreast of the rising costs, that may be acceptable. Certainly it is not acceptable for people on fixed incomes.

The second point, Mr. Speaker, is again the crisis in the energy field today is undoubtedly brought on the crises in the oil industry over the years. When this Province, Mr. Speaker, was negotiating to buy out BRINCO the implication was that we will no longer be subject to the whims of the Arabs, that we will have electricity. The implication was that electricity would be cheaper in Newfoundland than oil. There is an abundance of electricity and we will no longer be subject to whims of the Arabs. We are therefore going to buy out or expropriate BRINCO.

Mr. Speaker, Newfoundlanders by the thousands, by the droves went to electricity, went to electrical heat thinking that they would no longer be subject to the rising costs of oil. Now, Mr. Speaker, they are caught in the squeeze. They are indeed not subject to the whims of the Arabs but they are subject to the whims of Newfoundland Hydro and this government. Based on the performance this past year, Sir, I do not know whether they are going to be better off. Mr. Speaker, there will come a time when the ability of our people to stand any further increases in their cost of their basic services, the point when they can stand no more, that will come. I am afraid, Sir, we are very fast approaching it.

Having said that, I support the petitions. I beg leave to lay upon the table this petition to be presented to the appropriate minister or department. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister without Portfolio.

MR. WELLS: Mr. Speaker, we all support the petitions asking that the cost of electricity be held down. But at the same time, we in this House have a duty to be realistic and we have a duty to the people who put us here. Prices are going up all over the world, not just of electricity but of a great many commodities and electricity is like oil. It is only another commodity. We have got to be realistic. I am not suggesting that we abandon in government completely the concept of paying through the peoples' taxes a part of the cost of electricity. We are doing that now. As the minister said and the Premier said a little while ago, and as the hon. member from Twillingate mentioned, this has to continue to some extent but at the same time, Mr. Speaker, it is folly and nonsense and the height of irresponsibility for anybody to suggest that we can go and underwrite by using peoples' taxes, underwrite the rising cost of electricity. Would we underwrite the rising cost of motor cars? Would we underwrite the rising costs of microphones or any of the thousand and ten thousand things that Newfoundlanders use in the ordinary course of their daily life. What I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, is that we have to be realistic. We have to recognize that be it oil or motor cars or electricity or anything else which we consume in this Province - bread, milk, anything - that in the final analysis it is we and we only who are going to have to pay for it. We have the choice only of paying for it with our taxes or directly on the bill. Now, at the moment there is a combination of both things. We have to be careful, as this government is careful, Mr. Speaker, that it does not get out of line and that too much is not paid by the taxes of the people and too little paid on the bill itself.

MR. F. WHITE: I rise to present a number of petitions -

MR. SPEAKER: Before I recognize the hon. gentleman to present a petition I wish to ask are there any further comments on the previous petition?

MR. NEARY: Mr. Speaker, I support the petition presented by the member for Windsor-Buchans, Sir. The only point that I want to make with regard to his petition, and some of the remarks that have been made earlier, that in this Province I believe the bulk of the power that is produced in this Province is hydro power. So

MR. NEARY:

I do not see, Sir, where the cost of oil would really have any bearing on the increased cost of electricity in this Province, except for the thermo generating plant down here at Holyrood. That is the only place that I know of in the Province that is using diesel fuel. We have I would say probably 90 per cent of the power that is generated in this Province, or 95 per cent is - the hon. House Leader (Mr. Wells) shakes his head. Well maybe my figure is a little bit high but I certainly would like, Mr. Speaker, for somebody to set the record straight. How much of the power used in this Province is generated through waterfalls, through hydro power? How much of it is hydro power and how much of it is generated at Holyrood, because obviously the government are laying great emphasis on this as being one of the main reasons for increasing the cost of electricity. Certainly the cost of running water, water going over the falls, is not increasing that much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Are there any further comments on the petition?

The hon. member for Lewisporte.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a number of petitions some of them coming from my own district of Lewisporte and others from districts nearby. The prayer of the petition, Mr. Speaker, is against the high cost of electricity as the remainder of the petitions we have heard today. I have one from the town council of Lewisporte and signed by residents of the Lewisporte area. I have a petition, Mr. Speaker, from the Gander town council and circulated in the Gander area by the Gander Youth Committee and signed by people in the Gander area. Also, Mr. Speaker, a petition from Glenwood signed by the people in that area; from the Gander Chamber of Commerce representing over 100 members and businesses in the town of Gander; a petition from Point of Bay, the town of Point of Bay in the district of Exploits and also, Mr. Speaker, a petition from Northern Arm also in the district of Exploits.

MR. WHITE:

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to support other petitions that have been presented today. Going through my district, Sir, I have seen electric bills this Winter that have been extremely high, and while the government House Leader said we have to be realistic - indeed we do, Sir, we have to be realistic in the sense that how much can we expect our people to pay in times of rising costs. As my colleague the member for Windsor-Buchans (Mr. Flight) mentioned, it is extreme hardship on those on fixed incomes. Mr. Speaker, once again I would like to support the remainder of the petitions that have been presented here today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Is there any further comment on the petition?

The hon. member for Stephenville.

MR. W. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, I ask leave to present a petition on behalf of the district of Stephenville. The people of my district, Stephenville, feel strongly against the electrical rate increase at this time of high inflation. They feel the government should not allow an increase in rates. They also realize that Newfoundland Hydro is a crown corporation and it is because of this fact that they would like to see the government take a more humane position on the needs of the Newfoundland people. An increase at this time could and will break many families who are just making ends meet.

The government is asked to remember that their whole existence is to make living a little better for the people they serve. I, therefore, on behalf of the people I serve, petition the government not to permit the increase of electricity rates and also I would like to congratulate the member for Terra Nova (Mr. Lush) for bringing this petition to the people of Newfoundland. Mr. Speaker, I ask that this petition be placed upon the table of the House and referred to the department it relates to.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Is there any further comment on the petition?

The hon. member for Port au Port.

MR. HODDER: Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a number of petitions with the prayer the same as my colleagues. Some of the petitions - I have two from Corner Brook; from St. George's, from the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, Local 1232, Corner Brook; a petition from Flat Bay, Newfoundland; from the Local 254, Office and Professional Employees International Union in Corner Brook; a petition from Lourdes in the district of Port au Port; a petition from the United Cement, Lime and Gypsum Workers, Local 327 in Corner Brook, and a petition from Boat Harbour West.

Mr. Speaker, high electricity rates have hit the low income earner the hardest. A few years ago the electric companies were encouraging people to use electric heat. Those who complied now regret that they did. As an example, in my district I know of a social assistance recipient whose home was destroyed by fire two years ago. He was encouraged to put electric heat in his home and now he cannot meet the cost, especially in light of the small amount of money paid to long term assistance recipients.

Mr. Hodder.

Ordinarily this person could have supplemented his fuel cost by using wood in those difficult times. Mr. Speaker, we know that inflation hits the lower and middle income person hardest. This government has committed itself to fighting inflation. In this regard, by allowing the rates to go up, we are making a mockery of the anti-inflation programme. There is a limit to which you can push the average Newfoundlander, Mr. Speaker, and we are fast approaching that point where some of our people will not be able to pay his bills and will run hopelessly in debt. In fact, Mr. Speaker, in terms of those of more unfortunate circumstances we have already reached that point. I, too, congratulate the member for Terra Nova (Mr. Lush) for bringing the rate increases to public light. I can assure you that every Newfoundlander will be grateful if this increase is not allowed. I ask that the petition be referred to the government department concerned.

MR. SPEAKER: Is there any further comment on the petition?

The hon. member for Conception Bay South.

MR. NOLAN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a number of petitions. I beg leave of the House to present these petitions from Local 1584 of Carbonear, one from Spaniard's Bay, one from the Community Council of Harbour Grace South, from Petty Harbour, Maddox Cove, the Community Council of Point Lance, from the Boot Workers Union of Bay Roberts, from the Sheet Metal Workers Local 552 from Conception Bay South, my own district, from Fermeuse, from the St. John's Jaycettes and from also a number of residents in Mount Pearl.

Mr. Speaker, to sum up as briefly as I can the prayer of the various petitions that I have mentioned and others that I have not mentioned here, the suggestion is that: (1) the people who are petitioning the House at this time cannot now in many instances afford the rates that they are now being charged - that is item one - let alone any consideration of any further increases. And the other thing is, like

Mr. Nolan.

many of you, of course, many people were talked in, through advertisements or whatever of heating better and cheaper electrically, which you all know, live better electrically. Well the fact is that this has not come about for many, many people, and what people are also suggesting in these petitions, Mr. Speaker, is: (1) they cannot afford to have the Government of Canada or any other government on the one hand say we are going to freeze your wages, and have another government, whether it is provincial or federal, or any agency of that government, then go about increasing what they need to keep a roof over their head or a bit of heat in it.

Now, Mr. Speaker, also within the petitions you will find that there is reference to the tax on the electricity which has been removed from the fuel oil - correct? - but not from the electricity. You will find that there is a tax on - am I right Mr. Minister of Finance?

MR. DOODY: You are referring to electric heat, I presume.

MR. NOLAN: Yes, of course, Sir.

MR. DOODY: The S.S.A. applies to all electrical power.

MR. NOLAN: Yes.

MR. ROBERTS: There is a tax on all electricity.

MR. NOLAN: Yes.

MR. ROBERTS: Heat and light.

MR. NOLAN: And while I do support the position of the Liberal Party, old-line Liberal Party, as portrayed by our hon. friend to our far right -

MR. ROBERTS: The only Liberal Party.

MR. NOLAN: And -

MR. DOODY: To our far left.

MR. NOLAN: To our far right.

But the fact is that he has made a point, Mr. Speaker, which is also referred to in many of the letters we get and that is: Does the Public Utilities Board have the authority to look into political decisions

Mr. Nolan,

made by the group that appointed them in the first place? And unless you can get there -

AN HON. MEMBER: Yes.

MR. NOLAN: No! No!

AN HON. MEMBER: Yes.

MR. NOLAN: No, they do not.

MR. MURPHY: What were their terms of reference?

MR. NOLAN: Their terms of reference - if certain hon. gentlemen have their way, I am sorry to say, on both sides of the House that you, Mr. Minister, although you are Minister of Provincial Affairs and Consumer Affairs, may not have the authority to represent the people in your district without you get the permission from the Law Society, and that is what has come up here in the last two weeks, as you know. Why was Mr. Peddle so embarrassed down there?

MR. MURPHY: He was not.

MR. NOLAN: He was not, eh?

MR. MURPHY: No, no!

MR. NOLAN: Are you suggesting it is not within the Law Society Act that only a lawyer represent people?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please! Order, please!

MR. NOLAN: Thank you. Only one other point and that is this, that before I lay these petitions on the table of the House, Mr. Speaker -

MR. MORGAN: An open line show.

MR. NOLAN: Jaws from Bonavista is quibbling again, Mr. Speaker. I would rather be on an open line show than before the Construction Bonsel insulting civil servants.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear! Hear!

MR. SIMMONS: And you get booed down in the process.

AN HON. MEMBER: And to get booed down.

MR. SIMMONS: Shocking, disgraceful, a Minister of the Crown -

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. WELLS: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to mention to the members that there is a rule of relevancy in this matters. We have gone on these petitions all afternoon. It is all right, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, as long as we stick to the point. But if the debate, and I think that is the word, becomes as it is at the moment the whole thing falls to the ground.

MR. ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, to that point of order, I agree completely, there is a rule of relevancy. But I might point out that if my colleague and friend, the gentleman from Conception Bay South (Mr. Nolan) strayed just a little from the rule it was because he was being cruelly harassed by the gentleman from Bonavista South (Mr. Morgan), aided in a silent way by the gentleman from Green Bay (Mr. Peckford), and I would suggest to the hon. the House Leader on the other side that he should try to control his own colleagues and if they do not interrupt the gentleman from Conception Bay South (Mr. Nolan), the work of the House will go much more quickly, Sir, and we will all be better served.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. member for Conception Bay South (Mr. Nolan), is asked to continue his remarks, to keep them relevant, and hon. gentlemen to my left are asked not to interrupt.

MR. NOLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just one final point from the prayer of the petition and it is this, that I would like to mention that we have heard comments from many people in the House this afternoon, commenting on energy and so on; one, we have heard some great wisdom on the great cost of oil all over the world and so on, and yet here we have people in the galleries who find out that we have a big industry that is going down because of the price of oil that we are getting.

Just one final item and it is this and that is we understood prior to Christmas that the Minister of Justice is the minister to whom the Newfoundland Hydro Board is responsible and yet we have heard from minister after minister today and he has not opened his mouth, respectfully, concerning the matters that we are dealing with here in these petitions. Anyway I would like to present the petitions and beg to refer them to the department -

MR. MURPHY: Public Utilities you mean, not the Hydro.

MR. NOLAN: No, no, the Minister of Justice responsible for Hydro, or maybe Public Utilities I do not know. Maybe both.

MR. SIMMONS: Well who is?

MR. MORGAN: I am lost. I do not know.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. NOLAN: The only thing lost, Mr. Speaker, for this hon. gentleman is the highways equipment, the derelict work that he has got out here. It is a scandal the way this man gets on.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please! Order, please!

The hon. gentleman has already asked leave to table the petition. Is there any further comment on the petition?

The hon. member for LaPoile.

MR. NEARY: I would just like to take a moment to support my hon. friend in the various petitions that he presented on behalf of the people that forwarded the petitions to the hon. member for Conception

MR. NEARY: Bay South (Mr. Nolan). I concur with most of the remarks made by the hon. gentleman but, Sir, let me point out to the House that the great weakness in passing this responsibility over to the Public Utilities Board is this, Mr. Speaker, that the Public Utilities Board will merely look at balance sheets, look at the hard, cold figures that are in front of them. They will not take into account—and if anybody read the letter in The Evening Telegram and The Daily News recently, written by the Chairman of the Public Utilities Board, you could not help but realize that the Chairman and the Board will only look at the figures, the balance sheet. They will not take into account, Sir, any political goofs that are made, any mistakes that are made by the government. They will not listen to argument, for instance, on opinion, whether or not there was a blunder made by the government in doing this or making that decision or this decision. And that is why, Sir, we have to keep the Newfoundland Hydro, which is a creature of the government, keep it under the Minister of Mines and Energy. Because as I said earlier, Sir, the politicians are more sensitive, at least I hope they are, to the needs of the people than the members of the Board of Commissioners of Public Utilities.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. member for Twillingate.

MR. SMALLWOOD: Mr. Speaker, this Fouse a number of years ago passed a law creating the Public Utilities Board or Commission, and in that law it is spelled out, this House spelled out precisely what the Public Utilities Board or Commission, I believe they changed the title, have they, from Board to Commission but it is the same body - are required to do.

AN HON. MEMBER: A Board of Commissioners.

MR. WELLS: A Board of Commissioners.

MR. SMALLWOOD: Yes. A Board of Public Utilities Commissioners.

AN HON. MEMBER: The Board of Commissioners of Public Utilities.

MR. SMALLWOOD:

All right, we know what we are talking about. Surely nobody but this House or the cabinet, nobody in the Province is going to have any right to determine political matters except of course the people in an election.

AN HON. MEMBER: Hear, hear!

MR. SMALLWOOD: You are not going to give to a group of commissioners appointed under salary, full-time men, any rights to make political decisions. What they will have the right to do is carry out the law that this House passed and gave them. That law tells them what they must do, and they have no choice, no choice. Dare they go away from the law that creates them and gives them whatever authority they have! They cannot go outside that.

Now, on a larger scene in Canada a court can try a man for murder and find him guilty and sentence him to death, and dare the court do anything else. But over and above the court are the cabinet of Canada. They can say, oh yes, this court found that man guilty of murder and sentenced him to death but we, the cabinet, commuted, we forgive him, at least we order that he will not be executed. Well similarly this Public Utilities Board will follow the law, and they will render a verdict, but over and above them stands the cabinet.

MR. SIMMONS: Hear, hear!

MR. SMALLWOOD: Well this meets my hon. friend's objection.

MR. NEARY: No, not really.

MR. SMALLWOOD: His objection would appear to be or his argument would appear - and perhaps I have not understood him and that is my fault, not his because he has rare ability to explain himself and I am the one who did not quite follow.

MR. NEARY: No, Newfoundland Hydro, Sir, does not have to answer to the Public Utilities Board at this moment.

MR. SMALLWOOD: Not Newfoundland Hydro?

MR. NEARY: That is right.

MR. SMALLWOOD: The thing I created only I called it the Newfoundland

MR. SMALLWOOD:

Power Commission, was it, and now the new administration changed the name. It is the same body. I am not talking about them. I am talking about the Public Utilities Commission or Board or whatever it is they call it. I gathered that the hon. member, my colleague, my fellow Liberal, -

MR. NEARY: Hear, hear!

MR. SMALLWOOD: I gather that he argues that it ought not to be in the hands of the Public Utilities Board because they can only go about the law. They cannot take political aspects into account. The fact, as the hon. member for Buchans-Windsor (Mr. Flight) pointed out, people with low pay, people with fixed income and so on are suffering badly as the price of electricity goes up and up and up. And he might have added the price of everything else goes up and up and up. That is something that the Public Utilities Board cannot look at. The law does not allow them to look at. The law lays it down very strictly, the law that this House passed, remember, what they may do and what they may not do. But over and above them is the cabinet.

Did we not hear a case this afternoon of where the Premier comes back from being away somewhere, learns that an order -

MR. CROSBIE: The hospital.

MR. SMALLWOOD: - came back from hospital - learns on his return to his home that an order has been made. He does not like the order. He is quite right, and he changes it. You remember? Is that not the answer to my hon. friend?

MR. NEARY: Partly.

MR. SMALLWOOD: What he did in this case he can do in another with the support of his colleagues. If a Premier starts doing things without the support of his colleagues in cabinet he will not be Premier too long. But that authority is there. So I hold that perhaps there is no particular reason for my hon. friend's fears.

Now, on the other point, one other point as to whether or not the government, the government itself should be under the control of a number of civil servants, the

MR. SMALLWOOD:

Public Utilities Board are a number of civil servants. Shall the government, through the Newfoundland Hydro - Newfoundland Hydro are the government, they are an agency of the government, they are the government, in certain respects they are the government - shall they be subject to a number of civil servants? I say surely not, surely not. Surely we will not put Newfoundland Hydro, the old Newfoundland Power Commission of which George Hobbs was Chairman, that body, we will not put them under a civil service board, will we?

MR. NEARY: That is right. Hear, hear! That is exactly what I am saying.

MR. SMALLWOOD: In that case, my hon. friend, I am happy to know, and I see perfectly heart to heart, eye to eye and mind to mind.

MR. DOODY: We are all as one.

MR. SMALLWOOD: What was that?

MR. DOODY: I say we are all together on it.

MR. SMALLWOOD: Ah! All as one, yes.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Provincial Affairs and the Environment.

HON. A.J. MURPHY: As minister responsible for consumer affairs I feel I should add my support to those fears expressed with reference to rates. As a St. John's representative I would just like to say that there has not been any dancing in the streets of recent weeks by the residents of St. John's. I only heard one mention made of all the petitions and that was the St. John's Jaycettes, a bunch of glamorous young ladies mentioned by St. John's South. The member did not mention St. John's. He might have it there. But I received many dozens of complaints to my office about it. I investigated the thing, explained the position. Like everything else, like the St. John's people as proved in the last election, they have the foresight and the common sense to do and accept things as they are. I was rather surprised at the member for Twillingate (Mr. Smallwood) when he mentioned should someone be under a bunch of civil servants because I take my mind back about seven years ago when I referred to a decision made by the same board and I think there was a call went out for four policemen to get me out of the House because they were compared as similar to the Supreme Court of Canada. I do not know if anybody else was in the House at that time.

MR. MURPHY:

But anybody who dared to object to a ruling by this board now which the member for Twillingate refers to as a bunch of civil servants I thought I had really contravened some act in insulting a judge of the Supreme Court. So now we have an about-face today. They are only civil servants and they have not the rights that were stated five or six years ago.

I know we are all very much concerned. We have spent the whole afternoon here presenting petitions. I do not know what affect it is going to have. There is no election, I do not think, for the next few years. I think people will become reconciled. As Minister of Consumer Affairs, I did just a little survey, Sir, of the four Atlantic Provinces and discovered that Newfoundland was the cheapest of the four Provinces. Rates are going up everywhere else. Again the taxpayers of St. John's, Sir, are paying I would say, one-third extra of the rates for other areas outside of Grand Falls, St. John's and Corner Brook because there is a uniformity of rates. I think the member for Twillingate would know that where rates would be uniform right out instead of someone in Buchans or down in Lewisporte or somewhere paying twenty cents per kilowatt, they are only paying twelve cents because the people in St. John's, instead of paying six cents are now paying twelve cents. I think basically that was the argument.

We are, the people of St. John's, as I say again, good sensible people, all the districts, they are prepared to help out the rest of the Province. So, look, let us not get too excited. I do not think there is going to be an election called tomorrow. We can get all the petitions we want in but I do not think it is going to have one bit effect really on the people of this Province who know if they are going to enjoy all electric heat, or whatever it might be, we must pay for it the same as motor cars or anything else.

MR. SPEAKER: Are there any further comments on the petition? The Minister of Justice.

HON A. HICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, just a few brief comments in supporting this petition because there have been some statements made today which are somewhat

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MR. HICKMAN:

erroneous. The Board of Commissioners of Public Utilities are not civil servants.

AN HON. MEMBER: Hear, hear!

MR. HICKMAN: The members of the Board of Commissioners of Public Utilities are appointed under the Public Utilities Act which puts them in a totally different category from public servants. They are there and they are headed by a gentleman named Mr. Clarence W. Powell, a sensitive Newfoundlander from Carbonear who served as a magistrate in many parts of this Province, and then as a Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs and who is regarded as the ablest chairman of any of the ten provincial Boards of Public Utilities in Canada.

MR. SMALLWOOD: One of the finest Newfoundlanders we have.

MR. HICKMAN: And one of the finest Newfoundlanders we have, sensitive. And, Mr. Speaker, whilst I agree with the statements made in support of the petition that a board, that a cabinet, that a government should not be subjected to decisions by a board, but let me point out to those who used to scream so loud and long for participatory democracy that in Canada today in some of the provinces there is a provision whereby the crown corporation, the Ontario Hydro whenever it decides to increase its rates to the consumer or to one or two private companies that are still operating in Ontario they must submit their rates first to the Energy Board, the equivalent of our Board of Public Utilities, to give the consumer, to give the taxpayer the right to appear before that Board and make representation as to the reasonableness of what that Hydro crown corporation intends to do. But the Board does not make a ruling, it does not direct the minister responsible in the Government of Ontario or in the NDP governments as to what the rate shall be, he simply says, I recommend based on the knowledgeable representation by the consuming public that a reasonable rate for Ontario Hydro would be X number of dollars -

MR. SMALLWOOD: Who says that?

MR. HICKMAN: The Board.

MR. SMALLWOOD: Yes.

MR. HICKMAN: But it is not binding.

MR. SMALLWOOD: What he says, if the hon. minister will allow me?

MR. HICKMAN: Yes.

MR. SMALLWOOD: Who has the last say, the Cabinet, the minister?

MR. HICKMAN: Yes.

MR. SMALLWOOD: That is all I am saying.

MR. HICKMAN: That is right. But what I am saying is do let anyone run away with a sweeping statement that a Crown corporation such as Hydro should not be under an obligation to appear before a Utilities Board because there is a great deal of precedent in Canada for it without offending the other principle of the supremacy of the legislature and the obligation of government. But I simply rise in supporting this petition to assure anyone who may be listening that

Mr. Hickman:

the people of Newfoundland are very fortunate indeed in having at their disposal what I consider to be the strongest Board of Public Utilities Commissioners in this nation.

MR. NEARY: So what?

AN HON. MEMBER: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Are there any further comments on the petition?

The hon. Member for Bay of Islands.

MR. L. WOODROW: Mr. Speaker, I said earlier in the debate that I would present some petitions tomorrow. But if you would permit me I could present them today if I am still in order?

MR. SPEAKER: Before doing so I would just wish to see if there are any other hon. members who wish to comment on the previous petition. It appears that there is not. The hon. Member for Bay of Islands.

MR. WOODROW: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have five petitions, and one letter representing a whole community. The first one is from Cox's Cove with 374 names. The next one is from McIver's 267; Gillam's 82; Lark Harbour 307; York Harbour 119; and a letter from the Council in Summerside, the letter represents all of the people. You know, there was one that did not reach me from Frenchman's Cove, it got to the Member for LaPoile (Mr. Neary), I believe. I think he mentioned it already.

Now incidentally I was not going to present them today because there are several other communities in the district of the Bay of Islands, I understand, who are going to send petitions. So I humbly present them today. And I would also like to say that in the urban part of the Bay of Islands district it falls under the city of Corner Brook, and

Mr. Woodrow.

I know when I was member of council for the city of Corner Brook certainly we had to fight many times the Board of Public Utilities not only on increases in electricity but increases in light and power rates and so forth and, of course, at the present time, as you know - I do not want to get away from the topic, Mr. Speaker - at the present time there is fighting - I use that word - going on against the rates for the CN buses. So, as I said, I very humbly present these today. I really feel that the thing certainly is of urgency. I do not proclaim to know all about it, Mr. Speaker, but I want to say this, that as a member of the Bay of Islands district, as I have already stated - I do not want to be repetitious - I realize how difficult these people are having it, especially people in the rural part of the district. So I would like to present those now, if the page would come along. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Are there further comments on this petition?
The hon. member for Burgeo - Bay d'Espoir.

MR. SIMMONS: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in support of the petitions so ably presented by the member for Bay of Islands (Mr. Woodrow). Let me say, Mr. Speaker, that I believe in doing so. The member has demonstrated great courage, the kind of courage which we need in this House. I do hope that he will continue to obviously play a hand, as he obviously has, play a hand in getting other petitions circulated in various communities of his district. And I hope that the net result, Mr. Speaker, of his solicitations and his efforts, for which I commend him, will be that he will be able to get across to the government, which he supports, in a way that we have not been able today, my colleagues on this side of the House, including those here in the official Opposition, and the member for LaPoile (Mr. Neary), in a way that we have not succeeded, if one may judge from the comments that are coming back, convince them that this is a problem, that people are 'not liking' in the words of the Minister of Mines and Energy or in the words of the Minister of Consumer Affairs,

Mr. Simmons.

people will 'be reconciled' to it. Mr. Speaker, they do not have the message. And I sincerely hope that the petitions that the member for Bay of Islands (Mr. Woodrow) has presented will get the message across in a way that we obviously have not. We have not gotten through to these people, Mr. Speaker. The people just do not like it. It is not that simple, Mr. Speaker.

MR. WELLS: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. SIMMONS: They are outraged by it.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please! A point of order has been raised.

MR. WELLS: Mr. Speaker, if this is not debate, then I have never heard debate. Mr. Speaker, this is out of order at this time.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. House Leader is quite correct. The hon. gentleman was entering the realm of debate and is directed not to do so.

MR. SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly apologize for bending the rules. I was assuming that the discussions this afternoon had been quite far-ranging, and I was taking the same liberties, but I shall abide by the rules.

I do, though, Mr. Speaker, want to congratulate the member for Bay of Islands (Mr. Woodrow), and I do want to ask him and encourage him and urge him to make sure that every colleague in that government which he supports is fully aware, Mr. Speaker, that the people of this Province do not just like it or do not plan to become reconciled to it, they are outraged by it! They are outraged in the thousands, Mr. Speaker, as these petitions we presented here, my colleagues have presented this afternoon, attest. They are outraged, and that is the message in the petition. I get a little disturbed when I hear ministers stand up and make light of those petitions.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please! Order, please!

I must direct the hon. gentleman to the very clear statement of rules that there can be no debate on a petition. There has been a certain latitude with respect to what could be interpreted as relevant or not during this afternoon's presentation of petitions, and this, it would appear, by

Mr. Speaker.

general concurrence of hon. members. But on the specific point of debate on a petition that I do not think is a rule which should be given latitude.

MR. SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just want in concluding to reiterate my support for the member's petition, the member for Bay of Islands (Mr. Woodrow). I hope that he is just one of many on that side of the House who have petitions to present, who have heard from their constituents, as we have. We have a number here representing some of their constituents. I do not know if it is because they refuse to present them or what the case may be. But I

MR. SIMMONS:

congratulate him, Mr. Speaker, on his courage and I heartily, heartily without reservation support the petition and I heartily pray that the prayer of the petition will get through to the ministers who have so far not shown much sympathy for the concern that Newfoundlanders have expressed by affixing their signatures to these petitions about the outrageous and ever rising cost of electricity, costs, Mr. Speaker, rising costs which have been sanctioned by cabinet secretively back in December, and I predict, Mr. Speaker, would still be secret had my colleague from Terra Nova (Mr. Lush) not exposed it on January 22.

MR. ROBERTS: Hear, hear! Well said.

MR. SPEAKER: Are there any further comments on this petition?

The hon. member for Conception Bay South.

MR. NOLAN: Mr. Speaker, I merely rise very briefly to support the plea of the petition as submitted by the member of the House of Assembly from Bay of Islands (Mr. Woodrow). All of us obviously support his petition, the prayer of the petition as signed by so many people in that area, as we do all other petitions presented today.

One final point, and it is this. I think it is necessary, Mr. Speaker, with your permission for me to say that no one at any time during the presentation of these petitions attempted in any way to cast aspersions towards the Chairman of the Board of Public Utilities Commission, Mr. Clarence Powell, who, as the Minister of Justice has stated, is one of the finest, most able and capable civil servants in this Province today and who has worked very closely not only with the Minister of Justice but with other members on this side of the House as well. So I think that even bringing up the situation, attempting to bring that man's name into this if it is a debate is a red herring. There is no necessity for it. No one has ever doubted his ability, no one.

MR. HICKMAN: You were the first one to raise it.

MR. NOLAN: I raised about the Public Utilities Commission and their

MR. NOLAN:

authority. I never at any time, ever, questioned the ability or the integrity of Mr. Powell and I suggest the Minister of Justice certainly knows that full well.

MR. ROBERTS: Hear, hear! Hear, hear! Hear, hear! Well done. Well said.

MR. HICKMAN: What a mockery!

MR. NOLAN: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the minister is asking a question or just uttering to himself. But if he would like to clarify it I would be quite happy to try to answer it.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. gentleman wishes to comment on the petition?

MR. NEARY: Yes.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. member for LaPoile.

MR. NEARY: Mr. Speaker, I want to rise to support the petitions presented by the member for Bay of Islands (Mr. Woodrow) and in so doing, Mr. Speaker, I want to give the hon. member a pat on the back.

AN HON. MEMBER: Hear, hear!

MR. NEARY: I think it is well deserved, Sir. I just came back from Corner Brook. I was out on the West Coast visiting my district of LaPoile and I had the occasion to attend a transportation conference in Corner Brook and I heard some very glowing reports about the hon. member. Some people came to me, wrote me and called me about the petitions on the electrical increases in Bay of Islands and they wanted to know whether they should send them to me, as well as other members by the way. I said, well if you think your member is doing a good job and he can be effective in the House of Assembly send them to your own member. In this particular case I am proud to say, Sir, and happy to say that probably some of the names on the petition that the hon. member presented are people who called me and I referred them to the hon. gentleman because the hon. gentleman seems to be one of the members of this hon. House who seems to be able to get down to the grass roots and is doing a good job for his constituents, and

MR. NEARY:

I congratulate him for it and I congratulate him for bringing this petition before the House today, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER: Are there any further comments on this petition?

Are there any further petitions?

The hon. member for Baie Verte-White Bay.

MR. RIDEOUT: Mr. Speaker, I rise to beg leave to present a number of petitions protesting increased electricity rates from communities in my own district as well as from a number of communities in that area. I have a number of petitions here from Baie Verte. There is one from Middle Arm. There is one here from Hampden, Ming's Bight, Bide Arm, Tilt Cove, Lush's Bight, Beaumont, Howley, and a number of other communities.

I will be very brief in supporting the prayer of those petitions. It seems that to all of us there is a degree of unanimity here that we are all supporting the prayer of those petitions. I would just like to say that the people of this Province are already feeling the crunch of restraint and that it only takes one extra little straw to break the camel's back, and that electricity is an essential commodity and therefore with all the other hon. members who have spoken on those petitions today and along with these I have here I support the prayer of the petitions and I ask that they be laid on the table of the House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Are there any further comments on this petition?

Are there any further petitions?

The hon. member for Carbonear.

MR. R. MOORES: In the absence of the hon. the member for Bellevue (Mr. Callan) who is now presently in a meeting with the Premier of the Province on the Come By Chance oil refinery, he has asked me to present a petition on behalf of the citizens of Norman's Cove - Long Cove. Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the member, I would like merely to read the prayer of the petition and have nothing further to say because I believe a lot has been said and discussion, I think, may have become a little redundant.

"WHEREAS the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has granted an increase of 40 per cent on the price of electrical power to the Newfoundland and Labrador Power Commission; and WHEREAS the government has put a price freeze of ninety days; and WHEREAS a further increase is proposed at the end of the price freeze, we the undersigned residents of the municipality of Norman's Cove-Long Cove in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador respectfully request that the cost of the electrical power to the consumer not be increased. FURTHER, should the Power Commission require further financing to cope with increasing costs we propose that these increases be absorbed by the government out of general revenue or that the amount of subsidies to industries be decreased." Thank you very much.

Needless to say, Mr. Speaker, I support fully this petition and all petitions that have been presented to this House on this topic today. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the member for LaPoile.

MR. NEARY: Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the petition, Sir. There are some very interesting points made in the prayer of that petition, Sir, and I think probably the most significant point made in the petition is the fact that the administration should not make the customers of Newfoundland Light and Power Company pay for their goofs, or pay for their mistakes. The mistake that was made in forcing Churchill Falls and BRINCO out of this Province should be paid for out of general revenue - that is the point that is made in the prayer of the petition - and not out of the backs of the customers of Newfoundland Light and Power Company.

MR. NEARY:

So I whole heartedly, Sir, support the prayer of that particular petition. And I want to say for the benefit of my hon. friend the member for St. John's Centre (Mr. Murphy) that forty-six out of the 193 petitions that I presented today in this hon. House were from districts in St. John's.

MR. SPEAKER: Is there any further comment on this petition?

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition,

MR. ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, if I could say but a word on this. Then I think my friend and colleague from Fortune-Hermitage (Mr. Simmons) who seems to have difficulty attracting Your Honour's eye is anxious to do so.

Let me make just two comments, Sir. First of all, of course, all of us in the Liberal Party support the petition which the gentleman from Carbonear (Mr. R. Moores) presented in behalf of his colleague the gentleman from Bellevue (Mr. Callan). It is similar to many that have been presented this day and the point is extremely well taken. I would merely add a comment prompted by the remarks of the gentleman from LaPoile (Mr. Neary) to the effect that it is not just the people who buy their electricity from the Light and Power Company who are affected by these price increases. There are two other utilities effectively serving the people of this Province. I am not sure who sells power retail in Labrador West, but that would be a third or a fourth. The hon. gentleman from Menihek (Mr. Rousseau) tells me it is private and I suspect that the Iron Ore Company's - the rates are different in Labrador West than elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, we must not forget the fact that for many of the people of this Province the Light and Power Company are an unknown body. They buy their electric power either from Bowater Power, or in large parts of the Province, the district of Naskaup1, my own district and a great number of others, the Hydro Corporation themselves are the retail vendor as well as the wholesaler or the generator. And there has been a peculiar problem crop up with the Hydro which I can only assume was the result of some malfunction in those omniscient computers. Person after person in my district, and I know that people on the Labrador

MR. ROBERTS:

Coast have run into this, people on the South Coast have run into it, and people in every area where they are buying power from the Hydro Corporation - and I have written to the preseident of the Corporation, Mr. Groom but to date I have not a elicited a reply from him - they have found their bills doubled. That cannot be accounted for, Sir, by any increase because there has not been an increase within the period covered by those bills, and there has not been an increase in consumption sufficient to explain the increase in the billing.

So it is obvious, Sir, there is something very wrong in the billing system being used by the Hydro Corporation in their role as retailer to, I suppose, ten or fifteen or twenty thousand customers in very large areas of the Province, the more rural areas, the areas where the private utilities, so-called, as yet do not operate.

So it affects everybody, Sir. There is nobody in this Province, with the possible exception of people in the Western part of the Labrador, who are not being hit and hit cruelly. Electricity is no longer a luxury. It is as much a necessity, Sir, as a drop of water to drink or a piece of food to eat.

MR. ROBERTS:

I am told ninety-nine per cent of the homes in this Province are electrified. I have not quite figured out the one per cent because with 120,000 homes approximately, that would be 1,200 homes without electricity. I am not aware of 100 homes that do not have electricity. I am aware of several hundred that do not have publicly provided electricity. But, Sir, electricity is a necessity. Every Newfoundlander is affected by these rate increases and affected cruelly because he is affected unavoidably. A person can no more avoid these rate increases, Sir, than he can avoid breathing air or drinking water or eating bread. They must have them. They must have the electricity, Sir, and these increases hit cruelly and hit hard.

MR. SPEAKER: Are there any further comments on this petition? Are there any further petitions? The hon. member for Fortune-Hermitage.

MR. J. WINSOR: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present petitions on behalf of a number of communities in my district of Fortune-Hermitage. These are presented by the community councils of Pool's Cove in Fortune Bay, Jacques Fontaine in Fortune Bay, Seal Cove in Fortune Bay and Gaultois in Hermitage Bay. In supporting the prayer of these petitions I am very happy also to support the previous petitioners and their supporters from all parties. It points up the very great importance of this great problem. I would like to also congratulate the hon. member for Terra Nova who brought to the attention of all of us this inordinate increase outlining the drastic effect this would have on the standard of living of all our people.

To shorten up the time we have used on this, Mr. Speaker, I ask that this petition be placed upon the table, these petitions be placed upon the table of the House and referred to the department to which they relate. Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. member for LaPoile.

MR. NEARY: Mr. Speaker, I support the prayer of the petitions, Sir, presented by the member for Hermitage. In so doing, Sir, I want to -

MR. NEARY:

seeing that congratulations are on the move this afternoon, obviously the caucus, Sir, must have gotten together and decided that they would all pat themselves on the back - I would like to offer my sincere congratulations to Mr. Basil Jamieson who publicized this matter of increase in electricity rates long before the old-line Liberal Party jumped on the bandwagon, about the same time that I started the movement myself. I would also like to congratulate the people who are doing the open line programme on VOXM. I would like to congratulate in general the news media that have done such an effective job in publicizing the matter of the increases in electricity rates in this Province. I would say, Sir, but for them it would have been a dead issue, but for Mr. Jamieson and Mr. Sterrett and all the other gentlemen who have been, and Mr. Roberts, at the time out in - not the Leader of the old-line Liberal Party - but Mr. Mike Roberts out in Central Newfoundland who I understand is not doing the programme now. But all these gentlemen, Sir, who are way ahead of the game I think deserve the congratulations of the people of this Province. I would like to congratulate all those too who climbed aboard the bandwagon a little later on, Sir. The main thing is now to try to stop these increases in electricity rates and not play our little narrow-minded game of partisan, political politics. It is too important a matter for that, Sir.

AN HON. MEMBER: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. member for Twillingate.

MR. SMALLWOOD: Mr. Speaker, I have been thinking and thinking here this afternoon, thinking what I would do if I were a member of the Cabinet in this matter that we are discussing, what I would do if I were Premier, what advice I would give my colleagues in the Cabinet and what advice I would seek from my colleagues. Here I would see from all parts of our Province pouring in petitions and telegrams and letters and protests about the rising prices for electricity. I would realize that there is a widespread, a universal discontent and that the discontent over the increasing price of electricity is accentuated by increasing prices in everything.

Mr. Smallwood.

It would not be quite so bad if only the price of electricity were increasing at this rate or at these rates. What would I do? I would be very much concerned with a budget coming down shortly, and I would ask for an estimate of what it would cost, how much should be ask the House to vote to pay the deficit so that the increases would not have to be imposed on the public, especially those referred to by my hon. friend from Windsor - Buchans (Mr. Flight), low income people, fixed income people and so on, what can we do to prevent those people from having to pay these greatly increased rates for electricity? Will we pick up the tab as a government? If so, how much? What will it cost? What will we have to put into the budget? What will we have to ask the House for a week or two or three from now for that purpose? How much? What will it cost? How many millions?

Now we did have to deal with that very question some years ago in the matter of rural electrification. We authorized the Power Commission, which now has a new name, to charge for rural electricity a lot less than it was costing them with the government picking up the difference, and it was costing, I think, a million or a couple of million dollars a year for rural, to subsidize the price of rural electricity. But here we are talking in these petitions today, not about rural electricity, but electricity in St. John's and Gander and Carbonear and Harbour Grace and Grand Bank and Placentia and Gander and Corner Brook and Stephenville and all kinds of places in the Province that are not rural areas but are urban areas. We are talking about all the electricity sold to all the homes, one-hundred-odd thousand homes and also to hundreds, to thousands of shops and schools and factories and industrial plants. Are we going to be asked in this Chamber, when the budget comes down, to vote how many millions to save the increase? Shall we keep the freeze on for two or three years to come, not for two or three weeks, but years, and how much will that cost? Now we are going to have to face that, you know.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SMALLWOOD: We are not the government. We can have a lot of fun here in the House, you know, ramming it home to the government, ramming it home, jamming it down their throats, making them unpopular. We could have a lot of fun doing that, but shortly every member here, on both sides, is going to have to vote a budget. Now how will be in that budget to eliminate this increase cost of electricity? If it is a fact - and I do not know whether it is or not, I suspect that it is - if it is a fact that the actual cost of the electricity is going up, then either the price charged to the people must go up or the government must pick up the difference and come in here and ask us for the authority to do it and to vote them the money for that purpose.

MR. MURPHY: Would the hon. gentleman permit a question?

MR. SMALLWOOD: Pardon?

MR. MURPHY: Would the hon. gentleman permit a question?

MR. SMALLWOOD: Yes, of course.

MR. MURPHY: Would you do that on an individual basis on a needs test or would you subsidize it right across the board, everybody get power for below cost, or would you do it like on welfare?

MR. SMALLWOOD: I am not suggesting anything. I began by saying that I have been wondering what I would do if I were a member of the Cabinet, and even more if I were Premier, what would my policy be in this matter, which is a very practical thing. It is dollars and cents. It is cash. It is very practical and also very political. There is nothing much more political than something that affects every household in the Province. That is very political. I do not mean necessarily partisan political, but it is a very political problem. It is also a very hard-fisted financial problem and that is what we are going to be dealing with, I suspect, in the next two or three or four weeks in this Chamber.

MR. MURPHY: Have you the answer to the question I asked?

MR. SMALLWOOD: I cannot answer it.

MR. MURPHY: I think you referred to the man on the fixed income or the low income -

MR. SMALLWOOD: I said particularly it is hard on -

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MR. MURPHY: Will we subsidize him? Will we subsidize him?

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please! Order, please!

MR. SMALLWOOD:

I was merely agreeing with my hon. friend from Buchans-Windsor (Mr. Flight) that it is particularly hard on him, on the low - but it is hard on everyone.

MR. MURPHY: Sure it is. It sounds great.

MR. SMALLWOOD: It is hard on everyone to pay as the Minister of Mines and Energy said here this afternoon, everybody hates to pay more for anything, electricity or anything else. And especially it is tough on the low income, the fixed income persons. Not the commission agent, not the shopkeeper, not someone who can wack it on the public and, you know, get it back. The fellow with the low income, fixed income, or pension, he is stuck, he just has to pay it. In doing so he lowers his standard of living. Make no mistake about it, if these rates go up and they are put into effect you are lowering the standard of living of a great many families.

AN HON. MEMBER: Hear, hear!

MR. SMALLWOOD: That is what you are doing. Well now the question we have to ask is, is that inevitable? Are we bound to have a lowered standard of living in Newfoundland? I suspect that we are, that we are going to have to have a reduction in the standard of living. If the cost of living goes up and up and up and never stops going up and up and up, and income does not go up and up and up at the same rate, you are left with a lowered, a reduced standard of living, are you not?

Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I know that you have already drawn our attention several times today, that in the matter of petitions members are not allowed to debate, and I can only say that I have not been debating but it comes pretty close to it. Perhaps we will do some further debating on this matter later on when the budget comes down.

MR. SPEAKER: Before recognizing the hon. minister I should point out to hon. members that according to Standing Order 31 at five thirty a

MR. SPEAKER:

motion to adjourn is deemed to be before the Chair, and I have notice of one matter submitted to me on December 22 by the hon. member for LaPoille (Mr. Neary) who stated his dissatisfaction with the answer given to him by the hon. Minister of Provincial Affairs during the oral question period which dealt with the topic of the implementation by the provincial government of recommendations of the Food Price Review Board. So that matter will be up for debate at five thirty.

The hon. Minister without Portfolio.

MR. R. WELLS: I am sure we will all enjoy that debate. Mr. Speaker, I do not know if there are any more petitions on this. Your Honour has allowed a great deal of latitude this afternoon and perhaps it is a good thing, this is an important subject. I wanted to have a few words on behalf of the government on this matter and some of the subjects raised and I may well wander into the area of debate but I think it worthwhile that we canvas this. But if there are more petitions I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that they be presented now and then perhaps we can wind up our remarks on the subject naturally.

MR. SMALLWOOD: Why not speak now?

MR. WELLS: At any rate then, the hon. member for Twillingate (Mr. Smallwood), Mr. Speaker, raises the point of what the government's approach is or what the government's approach ought to be to this whole question of electrical rates. Now I want to say at the very outset, and it is suggested by some members in this hon. House that the government is not concerned about electrical rates, is not concerned about how high they go, I think any thinking person in this House or outside of it would recognize that this is not so. The government is extremely concerned and the government is concerned over every petition that has been presented in this House today on both sides, no matter where it comes from because it goes to the root of the whole question of the economics of running this Province and the finances of running this Province.

MP. WELLS:

There is one thing that is absolutely beyond everyone's control-and I have said this before and I will say it again now - and that is that there are various world matters, world price increases that affect the cost of living here in Newfoundland and they affect the price of commodities here in Newfoundland, as I say, whether they be bread or iron

Mr. Wells:

or metal, steel products, as I said the price of a car or whatever else and the price of electricity. Now we cannot do anything about that at all. The only choice that is left open to the Provincial Government of this Province is to say, all right the cost of electricity is going up. We cannot control it. We cannot control the price of a ball of wire. We cannot control, except to some extent, but largely the increase of wages which people must make in order to live. We cannot control it. The price is going up. It will continue to go up. All we can say is we will take so much of the taxpayers' funds and apply by way of subsidy toward the cost of electricity or we will let it go up and let more be paid directly on the bill. Now it seems that this has got to be said over and over and over to have the impact which it ought to have, because there is no waving of a magic wand that says the people of Newfoundland are going to get their electricity more cheaply, They cannot. They may, I or you or anyone else, Mr. Speaker, may get it more individually on the bill if as a taxpayer we pay more on the other side or the other end. But both ways we cannot have it. It has got to be paid for just the same as the price of a pound of sugar must be paid or the price of a car or the price of a glass or the price of a desk or anything else which is going up in our society and over which the Provincial Government of Newfoundland and the Provincial Government of Ontario or Prince Edward Island or Quebec or British Columbia has no real control.

Now there was mention made of the cost of oil. The people who have said because we have hydro power in Newfoundland generating most of the power why should these prices go up? But the price of oil is only one element, Mr. Speaker, in the cost of electricity. The cost of wages and wage settlements in Newfoundland have been high in recent years. That is fine. No one begrudges the man the right to earn a decent living but the cost has been high and the people who consume the product, in this case electricity, have to pay for it. We must recognize that. The cost of everything that the electricity utility uses has to be paid for, and it is just as well for us to face that.

Mr. Wells:

The other thing is that when we look at the cost of oil, as I think the hon. gentleman from Twillingate (Mr. Smallwood) said earlier this afternoon, we are not talking there, although it may be only about 30 per cent of the electricity produced in Newfoundland which is produced by oil, we are not talking about a marginal increase in the price of oil over the past four or five years, we are talking between \$1.25 a barrel and whatever it is now - what is it, \$11 on the barrel?

MR. SMALLWOOD: Up to as much as \$14 .

MR. WELLS: Up to as much as \$14, and it is going to go on and anybody knows who is sitting in this House today that beyond our control at all within three, four, five years oil is going to be \$25 a barrel. Gasoline that we put in our cars, without an increase in tax or anything else is going to be \$2, \$2.50 a gallon in the lifetimes of all of us, perhaps \$5 a gallon. And I think in the lifetime of all of us it is going to be a luxury that very few can afford, and if anybody has a car in Canada it is going to be a car about the length of that desk. And these things are coming and it is just as well for us to face it, and it is just as well for us to stop blindfolding the devil in the dark.

So there we have the concern, and this government is concerned, but the government can only balance the equation of how much public money is going to go into the price of electricity and how much private money by asking people to pay it on the bills. And it is our concern and our wish and our intention and our hope that bearing all of the influences that act upon these things in mind, that we will arrive at a judicious and proper balance of what this is going to be. But if these costs go up as they will, let no one say that this government is not concerned for the people of this Province. This government is concerned for the people of this Province far beyond the cost of electricity, its concern for the people of this Province and what they are going to have to pay in taxes, in how much money the government is going to have to borrow, and in how much our children and grandchildren are going to have to pay in debt retirement twenty, thirty, and forty years time. So that the government cannot look at a merely narrow

Mr. Wells:

issue and say, oh this is what will be done and blindfold the devil
in the dark. Any government, if it is worth its salt, has to look to
much wider issues than the mere

MR. WELLS:

price of electricity, important though that is. The hon. member raised one other question which is worthy, I think, of addressing ourselves to, and it is this: Will the standard of living rise or fall in Newfoundland? He suggested it would fall. I think the question is not whether it is going to rise or fall in Newfoundland, Mr. Speaker, but whether we are already witnessing the falling of the standard of living in the Western World. That, I think, is more to the point. That, I think, is where the oil prices really become significant, and I happen to believe, Mr. Speaker, that the standard of living in the Western World, by which I mean Canada, America, Western Europe, England, Germany, and in these countries, I believe that it hit its high point in the early seventies. And I believe that it is in the process of declining now because of inflation and the prices of commodities such as oil.

Now, we cannot, in Newfoundland, a tiny Province of 500,000 people, Mr. Speaker, we cannot swim against the tide. If the standard of living of Canada is declining, if the standard of living of the whole Western World is declining, in other words if your dollar or your pound or your lira or your franc are not going as far, then there is no way that we can increase the standard of the people of Newfoundland, the standard of living when all around us in Western society the standard is falling. So maybe when the hon. member poses the question I think he is right, I think he is hitting the nub of the whole question facing us today, not just in Newfoundland but in Canada. And these are questions that we are going to have to ask but unfortunately they are not questions that are going to be solved here in Newfoundland because every time that inflation erodes our dollar the standard of living tends to decline. Every time inflation erodes the dollar and people get more dollars but the productivity of the person does not go up, then the standard of living declines.

I think that if this debate is going to be responsible on the cost of increases in electricity and the taxes and everything

MR. WELLS:

else that go with it, if it is going to be sound, responsible, sensible debate so that we can make the best choices that are available to this Province, then all these things are going to have to be taken into consideration. If they are not taken into consideration, Mr. Speaker, the debate will be puerile and it will advance the cause of the people of Newfoundland nothing no matter whether rates are subsidized to the tune of 40 per cent or 60 per cent or 10 per cent. These are not the real issues. The real issues are productivity and what is happening in the rest of the world and how best we can buffer ourselves against the shock of what is going on with inflation and increased costs in the Western World.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Mr. Collins): The hon. member for St. John's East.

MR. MARSHALL: I have been here for most of the afternoon listening to the address and had not intended to get into what has turned into a debate but I think I might just now. What the hon. House Leader has said, he is correct to a very marked degree. What he has said really is the cost of everything is going up. I have heard the hon. member for Twillingate (Mr. Smallwood), the hon. member for LaPoile (Mr. Neary), hon. members all over the House today talking about the cost of electricity and about these bills. There seems to me to be, again, a divergence, a separation, and there is to a certain extent, I know, because in one case when you give an electrical bill it is payable by everybody without regards to their means. When you come to the point of the government revenues, it is derived from taxes which are paid in accordance with the means.

But there is one thing that I would like to point out. There does appear to be, or there has appeared to be this afternoon anyway, which is not unusual for this Province, to look upon the monies that are coming from the public purse, as it were, as separate and distinct from the monies that come from the individuals in the Province. That is not true. That is totally incorrect and it is a wrong basis. It

MR. MARSHALL:

is the basis of the people who went off on a tangent of deficit financing in this Province, that have got us in the strangle hold that we now find ourselves because the

MR. MARSHALL: monies whether they come from whencever they come, they come from the pocket of the people of this Province, be they in taxes, or be they in user electrical rates. And the only distinction between the two of them is that with user electrical rates they are put on a blanket position with respect to consumption, and people have to pay them whether they can afford them or not, and with respect to taxes they have to pay in accordance with their ability to pay. But I think we should get off this kick of the government should provide monies for it, and go no farther than that. Because I would like to hear some of the solutions passed by members on the other side, who are people who are advocating that the bills come down.

Now I happen to feel that the bills should come down, yes. But I think that there should be some solutions posed as well by those who like to throw in petitions ad nauseam when we know the fact of the matter is that the price of everything has gone up and that power has to be paid for, and has to be paid for in some manner. That is the first point I would like to make.

The second one is this -

MR. SMALLWOOD: Would the hon. gentleman allow a question?

MR. MARSHALL: Certainly.

MR. SMALLWOOD: The difference, of course, it has to be paid for obviously and he says it has to come out of the people's pockets but there are the people of Newfoundland and there are the people of Ontario and Alberta and British Columbia, the rich provinces, who between them give every year to the Newfoundland Government about fifty per cent and sometimes a bit more than fifty per cent of what the Newfoundland Government collects, they collect from the Government of Canada. So that if the people of Newfoundland out of their own pockets, privately, getting their monthly bills, pay the full cost of electricity, that is one situation, whereas if the government pays at least part of it the government pays it out of a sum, half of which came from Ottawa.

MR. MARSHALL: Okay, Mr. Speaker. That is a way to look at it. That is a way, like a person looking at his income tax and assumes that the money he is paying he is paying twenty or thirty whatever per cent it is on the last dollar. But the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member for Twillingate (Mr. Smallwood) says is true. We derive a lot of monies from Ottawa through the other provinces, through equalization payments. There is no doubt about that. But we have, Mr. Speaker, expended every cent of that and then some more, and believe you me there is no fooling it. The Armageddon, if you want to call it such, is coming on this Province who are going to get no more from Ottawa or what we are going to get we are going to have to use for certain purposes. So the extra money that comes in, that is what we have got to face in this thing now, instead of these unrealistic dreams that are being put forth in the House of Assembly.

The fact of the matter is that this money has to come because we have come to the end of our string, and this money has to come out of the pockets of the people of this Province, either through taxes or through payments. Now I say there has to be a balance between them, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SMALLWOOD: If the hon. member would again allow me? What the Government of Newfoundland gets from the Government of Canada it pays out. Now it can pay it out as a subsidy on electricity but what it pays out as a subsidy on electricity it cannot pay out on something else.

MR. MARSHALL: That is right. That is exactly the point. So the hon. member for Twillingate (Mr. Smallwood) has really answered his own point and we come back to square one, the point that I was coming to,

Now there has to be a balance, obviously, between the two of them, and this has to be the age old balance; do people have to pay a certain fixed amount, and people pay according to their means and that is the question, that is the question we have to address ourselves to. And I do not know what the solution is. All I say is that there

MR. MARSHALL: must be some formula brought before the House that the people of the Province can see. But before you can bring in this formula, whether so much per cent is paid out of general revenue, so much per cent on fixed charges, the people of the Province have to have confidence in the formula that is presented. The only way that they can have confidence in the formula that is presented, it seems to me, is if there be a full revelation of all of the facts.

MR. ROBERTS: Hear! Hear!

MR. MARSHALL: And I believe that the government intends, I understand the government intends to make the Newfoundland Hydro subject to the provisions of the Public Utilities Board. And I think until Newfoundland Hydro is made subject to the provisions of the Public Utilities Board so that they have to go to justify their wholesale rates and their retail rates in the same way as the

MR. MARSHALL:

Newfoundland Light and Power, and there is full public debate, there is a certain air in the minds, a certain idea in the minds of people planted, maybe justly, maybe unjustly - I think it is unjustly, but we will not know until we see it put forth - that Newfoundland Hydro is using the consumer electrical rates for the purpose of subsidizing capital expenditures be they in Bay d'Espoir, Gull Island or where have you. Now, I do not think that is done. I think, if memory serves me correct I think these statements are available and I think that can be proven. But it is certainly necessary that the Crown Corporation, Newfoundland Hydro, submit itself to the same examination of the Public Utilities Board as the private operator is itself because then and only then can the people of the Province be fully aware of the costs involved, the fact that electricity costs so much, it has got to be paid. Only if they can see the amount that has to be paid can they be satisfied with any formula split up between fixed charges and income tax.

MR. SMALLWOOD: Would the minister -

MR. NEARY: What about the political goofs that are made?

MR. SMALLWOOD: Would the minister -

MR. MARSHALL: Well, the political goofs that were made? What political goofs? There were lots of political goofs made when the hon. member was a member of an administration over here that this Province is going to be paying for for the next fifty years. So we will not talk about goofs.

MR. SMALLWOOD: Would the minister allow another question? He says the Newfoundland Hydro, the public body, the government, ought to be subject to examination by the Public Utilities Commission. He did not go on to say that that Public Utilities Commission ought to have the right to fix their rates. He says they should be examined. The facts come out, become public, of course, obviously, certainly. But what would he say as to who shall have the authority to fix the rates? Shall it be the rates charged by the Newfoundland Hydro? Shall it be the Public Utilities Board, or the Cabinet?

MR. MARSHALL: Well I thought that was implicit, Mr. Speaker, in what I said. I mean if you make - I think I said the Newfoundland Hydro should be

MR. MARSHALL:

subject to the Public Utilities Board in the same way as Newfoundland Light and Power and the other private ones are. Then the rates should be fixed. The rates obviously should be fixed in the same manner. They should operate in the same way as a private utility operates. Then these rates should obviously also, will also have to be at least subject to the scrutiny of the government afterwards. I am talking about from the general overall policy of paying the fixed rates and bringing before the House of Assembly, there should be full and complete debate, both in the Public Utilities Board through their scrutiny and through their fixing of rates. But if it found, obviously if this House finds that the fixed rates themselves result in a too high a demand upon the public purse in this Province so that it interferes with other necessary services such as education, such as health, such as what have you, then and in that event, then it is a matter of policy. It has to become a matter of policy of government, but only then and in that event. Otherwise I should not think that the Public Utilities Board should not be interfered with. So, in conclusion -

MR. NEARY: You are looking for someone to blame it on.

MR. MARSHALL: No, I am not looking for somebody to blame it upon. The point is this. There has been a lot of blame, Mr. Speaker, cast today, people saying the rate should not be so high. Nobody likes to see the rates so high. They should be hopefully reduced down. But I think at the same time we have to recognize that it comes out of the same pocket. It comes out of the pocket of Newfoundlanders and is going to and it is the formula that we had to determine. I do not think it profits us any to come in with - petitions have to be brought in, obviously, and it is worth the exercise to bring in these petitions. The people have the right to have them presented through their members and this is a good thing for us all to see. But I do not think, as the hon. the House Leader has indicated, that we can in effect blindfold the devil in the dark and turn around and say that, oh, the government has put up the rates and made people pay it, and they should pay it out of general revenue because when they pay it out of general revenue the people are going to be paying it anyway.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Opposition. I would remind him that in a couple of minutes or so the debate on the adjournment begins.

MR. ROBERTS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have only a moment or so. Perhaps all I can say in supporting whichever group of petitions happen to be before the House at this moment, that I think the afternoon has been a very, very useful exercise. I cannot recall ever before in my ten or eleven years or ten or eleven sessions in the House when the House has literally not got beyond petitions. There are more to be presented. I have a number here from my own constituency and I believe one or two of my colleagues have some. But I think it shows the depth of concern - Oh, we will present them tomorrow for the benefit of the Minister of Justice who looks anguished - it shows the depth of concern there is throughout this Province.

Mr. Roberts.

The petition presented by the gentleman from LaPoile (Mr. Neary) had many thousand names on it. I think he said 23,000 or 24,000. I did not note the exact figure. The petitions which have come in from other members, I have not added them up, but they doubtless total many thousands more, and I suppose in all there are 40,000 or 50,000 Newfoundlanders who have today indicated, through their petitions, their concern with this problem. While I do not want in any way to take away from what the House Leader for the Government said - I mean we must pay for what we have - I would point out there are two questions which must be examined and will be examined in debate and not on the petition, but I claim the same leeway that he has and the hon. gentleman from Twillingate (Mr. Smallwood) has and the gentleman from St. John's East (Mr. Marshall) has, and those two questions are: first of all, how we should bear the burden, whether it should be borne by user rates or by the general revenue, the taxation? We must bear the burden but how best to share it, and I think that is very, very important and needs to be examined very carefully. And secondly there is the other question which has been adverted to by the gentleman from St. John's East (Mr. Marshall) and by others and that is: How can we be sure that the burdens we are being asked to bear are necessary and that there are not undue costs or inefficiencies built into the rate structures? There is a measure of control through the Public Utilities Commission. It may not be satisfactory, it may not be perfect, but it is better than any alternative that has ever been put forward to my knowledge.

I am not aware - I have looked at other provinces, I have talked to other opposition leaders and premiers in other provinces, and they are all grappling with exactly and precisely the same problem, and they know of no magic answers, but they feel that the Public Utilities Commission route is by far the best one as it does provide, with some improvements which we will suggest, it does provide a means to test that. But I say there are only two questions, Sir: How much burden should the user of electricity have to bear, what is the inescapable cost? That must be paid? The second question

Mr. Roberts.

is: Once we know what is the inescapable cost, the burden which must be borne, how should we bear it as between the consumer, on the one hand, and the general user through the rate structure, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the taxpayers as a whole through the revenue collection and expenditure functions of the government?

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I have said - I guess it is 5:30 p.m., and Your Honour has been very tolerant. I am grateful - I think it has been a very useful afternoon because it has shown quite conclusively the depth of feeling, and I think the speakers on either side have brought forth quite a range of points and quite a range of viewpoints as well as points of fact or points of argument. I think it has been very useful. I hope, Sir, it is the prelude to a full-scale debate which we will have either on the Throne Speech or on the estimates on this whole question of electricity costs in this Province because, Sir, it is a subject that touches each and every one of our people and touches them inescapably, unavoidably and very much where it hurts, right in the pocketbook.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The motion before the Chair now is that the House do now adjourn. In this procedure, as hon. members will recall, each participant has five minutes. The one subject for debate this afternoon is, the implementation by the provincial government of the recommendations of the Food Prices Review Board and the Chair recognizes the hon. member for LaPoile (Mr. Neary).

MR. NEARY: Mr. Speaker, that would have been better put, Sir, as the non-implementation by the provincial government of the recommendations of the Food Prices Review Board. Sir, back in 1974, November 1974, going on two years, Sir, the Food Prices Review Board published a report and made ten recommendations regarding the high cost of living and the price of food in Newfoundland and Labrador, and to my knowledge, Sir, not one of the ten recommendations - let me put it another way - not one of the recommendations out of the ten that fall under provincial jurisdiction has been implemented by the provincial government. And I believe, Sir, at least, seven, if not

Mr. Neary.

eight, out of the ten recommendations of the Food Prices Review Board fall under provincial jurisdiction. Let me refresh members' memories by just

MR. NEARY: quoting a few of the recommendations directly from the report that was submitted in 1974.

Recommendation number two: The provincial government should encourage the development of a more integrated and more competitive system of food marketing within Newfoundland, particularly the development of an efficient system of wholesale distribution. The vigorous encouragement of retail consumer co-operative stores: The board considers of particular importance the development of a more effective system of wholesale purchasing for these stores. The provincial government should improve the facilities for distribution, handling and storing of food throughout the Province. This would require upgrading of roads on a systematic basis to meet the needs of distribution in all communities.

Well, Sir, we have not seen any action at all on any of these recommendations. Neither have we seen any action on the part of the provincial government on recommendation number five whereby the Food Prices Review Board recommends that the provincial government should reassess the potentials of local food production and processing and encourage the expansion of agricultural production.

As a matter of fact, Sir, we have seen the reverse. And we hear from the farmers and from the poultry producers and from the dairy farmers that they may have to go out of business because of the high price of feed in this Province and for various and sundry reasons. The provincial government, it says here, should enquire into the marketing of eggs in Newfoundland, especially the margin between producer prices and retail prices. Again, Sir, no action taken on that recommendation, number nine of the Commission. Yet, Sir, we hear of eggs being dumped in Canada every day. We heard only, I think it was yesterday or the day before yesterday, about powdered milk being stockpiled and dumped and spoiling. We hear the same thing about eggs. But one thing we did hear about, Sir, from the provincial government was the statement by the Minister of Consumer Affairs that they may, the government may - no, pardon me, the Minister of Consumer Affairs stated that he did not think that the government should establish a

separate Department of Consumer Affairs, the last recommendation in the Food Prices Review Board report. Yet the Premier says that it is his intention. The last Throne Speech brought before this House stated emphatically that there would be a separate Department of Consumer Affairs.

Well, Sir, I might agree with the hon. minister that we should not have a department if it is going to be like some of the other government departments that we have, especially the Department of Fisheries. All it does is rubber-stamp Ottawa programmes. If that is what the minister is referring to then I certainly agree with him. But there seems to be a contradiction here, Sir, and I would like for the minister to set the record straight.

Mr. Speaker, the whole purpose of this exercise, the whole intention behind pretty well all the recommendations was for the provincial government to take the initiative to eliminate the middleman in Newfoundland. No attempt has been made on the part of the minister or the administration to get rid of the middleman forever in this Province. And they are still here and they are still ripping off. I am happy to say, Mr. Speaker, that some of the suppliers on the mainland are now treating Labrador as a separate entity. Newfoundland and Labrador are being treated differently. A wholesaler or a retailer in Labrador can now import direct and no commissions are paid to anybody in Newfoundland. But that does not apply on the Island. They are still getting their rip-offs here, Sir, and they are still getting their commissions.

MR. SPEAKER: Order! Order!

MR. NEARY: So I will be looking forward to what the minister has to say in answer to some of this criticism, which I think is very valid, that I put forward today.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Provincial Affairs.

MR. MURPHY: Mr. Speaker, I have only a very few minutes and it has been just about two months since notice of this question was given. The hon. member could dash down to his office and pick up his few notes but I have to go to Elizabeth Towers and by the time I got back the debate would be over and I would have to go home. But

Mr. Murphy:

some of the things, you know, I get a great kick out of the hon. member from LaPoile (Mr. Neary), comes on shoots, off his mouth, no responsibility, he does not have to back anything up, you know, just a devious question! Now take the eyeglass thing, you, know, this meeting we had yesterday on the price of glasses, The airwaves were flooded with the hon. member. So we met in our department, I said, look, let us prepare our brief, but remember 'Mr. Neary' is going to be there and he is going to take at least four hours to expand all of the things that he has been feeding into open line, press, radio and everything else. 'Mr. Neary', the hon. member was non-existent yesterday, what happened?

MR. NEARY: I was -

MR. MURPHY: These are the people who accept the briefs. These are the people that you talk to, not to the public for votes. Go down and do something for the people that place their faith in you.

MR. NEARY: I was there -

MR. MURPHY: With reference to the report he is talking about, the dairy farmers.

MR. NEARY: I took up the whole conference -

MR. MURPHY: The dairy farmers. I heard Mr. MacDonald, who is the president of that, saying they are very, very happy now the price of feed is stabilized, there will be no increase in the price of milk, everything is going perfect. This is what he says today. The Egg Marketing Board - we are quite concerned with the Egg Marketing Board. There have been communications gone out to the Department of Agriculture asking to have a hard long look at the Egg Marketing Board. We are not too happy with it. As far as my statements are concerned that I did not think a separate Department of Consumer Affairs - I still feel the same way that we should not go to the whole rigmarole of setting up a complete new department with all of the money it entails. The Premier would like to have it. But I think he is quite happy with what is happening in the department in the past few months. Consumer Affairs has been highlighted. We have spoken on every matter that we

Mr. Murphy:

could. We are doing regular surveys. You know, if they give us a gun, but we have no ammunition in the gun. We can look at prices but we cannot roll back any prices. We have no authority to do it. We work very closely with the Federal Department who have the authority. Several things have come up. I get calls from members. I get my group out working on them as fast as I can. One instance, you know, you just talk about some of the things, in Corner Brook they were paying something like six cents a gallon extra for gasoline. We investigated it, and they said it was due to transportation costs.

MR. NEARY: The federal department of -

MR. MURPHY: The transportation costs in Corner Brook - now the hon. member has been shooting off his mouth all day, just give me the five minutes is all I want. You can go on immediately afterwards with the press. That is where he seems to be more effective shooting off his mouth.

MR. NEARY: Sit down, boy, and do not be making a fool of yourself.

MR. MURPHY: As far as the gasoline price in Corner Brook - the cost of transportation, we investigated it. The difference in delivering gas in Corner Brook than in St. John's was .45 -

MR. NEARY: You did not investigate it. That was done by the Federal Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

MR. MURPHY: Co-op Stores. One of the big problems we have in this Province is the co-op stores retailing in the retail business. Only a week ago I had the Minister of Co-op's in Saskatchewan with two of his people to come in here and talk about co-operatives. We do not cure these things overnight. We are still only three years in trying to correct some of the mistakes of the past twenty years, we cannot do that overnight. We are not miracle workers. And I will say this, that at the present time, and while we are trying to monitor prices, and we have discovered that prices have not advanced to any great extent since we are alerting the people to look out. The consumer is responsible for the high prices, no one else, if they are going to go in and pay the first price asked, good enough! But let the consumer shop around

Mr. Murphy:

to keep the prices down. In certain areas of the Province you are going to get higher prices.

AN HON. MEMBER: Anti-inflation groups.

MR. MURPHY: So you know there is not much I can say, as far as I am concerned, in answer to the questions. But I will say this, any member who has any complaint; I do not think we have been lax or slow in responding to anything from anybody. We are only too happy to do it. We only have a small staff. If we can get the staff to do it we can spread into the West Coast and Central Newfoundland and Labrador, but we just have four or five people who are working on this, you know, and they are not miracle workers. they are just ordinary human beings. I must say, they are a very dedicated staff. Anymore than that, Sir, I cannot add at the present time.

MR. NEARY: I would get more out of the Better Business Bureau.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion before the Chair is that the House do now adjourn. Those in favour "aye", contrary "nay", carried.

On motion the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow Friday, March 5, 1976 at 3:00 p.m.

C O N T E N T S

March 4, 1976	Page
Under Section 150 of the Election Act, Mr. Speaker communicated to the House that he had been informed by Mr. Arthur S. Mifflin, Chief Justice of the Trial Division of the Supreme Court, and Mr. John W. Mahoney, Judge of the Trial Division, that the elections held in the electorate district of Exploits and in the electoral district of Bonavista North in the general election of 16 September 1975 had been declared void, and that appropriate action had been taken.	2311
Statements by Ministers	
Mr. Wells made a statement concerning the oil refinery at Come By Chance.	2311
Commented on by Mr. Roberts.	2316
Commented on by Mr. Smallwood.	2318
Presenting Petitions	
Mr. Neary presented 193 petitions signed by 23,481 people protesting any increase in electrical rates.	2320
Leave granted to exceed the five minute limit imposed by the Standing Orders on the presentation of a petition.	2324
Mr. Neary (continued)	2324
Supported by:	
Mr. Crosbie	2327
Mr. Lush	2329
Mr. Lush presented petitions protesting any increases in electrical rates.	2329
Supported by:	
Mr. Crosbie	2330
Mr. Roberts	2332
Premier Moores	2335
Mr. Smallwood	2335
Mr. Woodrow	2340
Mr. Neary	2341
Mr. Flight presented petitions protesting any increase in electrical rates.	2344
Supported by:	
Mr. Wells	2347
Mr. Neary	2347
Mr. White presented petitions protesting any increase in electrical rates.	2348
Mr. McNeil presented a petition protesting any increase in electrical rates.	2349
Mr. Hodder presented petitions pretesting any increase in electrical rates.	2350

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Presenting Petitions (continued)	Page
Mr. Nolan presented petitions protesting any increase in electrical rates.	2351
Supported by:	
Mr. Neary	2355
Mr. Smallwood	2356
Mr. Murphy	2359
Mr. Hickman	2360
Mr. Woodrow presented petitions protesting any increase in electrical rates.	2363
Supported by:	
Mr. Simmons	2364
Mr. Nolan	2367
Mr. Neary	2368
Mr. Rideout presented petitions protesting any increase in electrical rates.	2369
Mr. R. Moores presented a petition in behalf of Mr. Callan, who was unavoidably absent, protesting any increase in electrical rates.	2370
Supported by:	
Mr. Neary	2370
Mr. Roberts	2371
Mr. J. Winsor presented petitions protesting any increase in electrical rates.	2373
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Mr. Neary	2373
Mr. Smallwood	2374
Mr. Wells	2379
Mr. Marshall	2385
Mr. Roberts	2392
Debate on the adjournment	
Implementation by the provincial government of the recommendations of the Food Prices Review Board of November, 1974.	
Mr. Neary	2394
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