

BACKLOG OF FREIGHT AT NORTH SYDNEY—REQUEST FOR
INDEPENDENT INQUIRY—POSSIBLE USE OF ADDITIONAL
ARMED FORCES AIRCRAFT

Mr. John Lundrigan (Gander-Twillingate): Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that on September 19 the minister indicated that, according to information from Canadian National Railways, the backlog of freight destined for Newfoundland would be cleaned up in about two weeks, and at that time there were 650 cars backlogged, and in view of his own statement today that there are 702 cars backlogged in the same system, would he cause an independent government or departmental inquiry, independent of the stuff he is being fed by Canadian National, into the circumstances so that he himself will recognize the dilemma facing the people on the east coast of this country?

Hon. Jean Marchand (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I think in order to be fair to all those working very hard to get rid of this backlog of freight destined to Newfoundland, particularly those in the Department of Transport and the ferry workers, I should point out that there is a normal backlog of about 200 cars between Moncton and the east, so you have to deduct that number from the 702 cars. It is for this reason we are making an all-out effort. We chartered 13 ships in order to get rid of the backlog. We have also had a strike in St. John's, and a bridge collapsed. In addition, there has been a tremendous increase in the amount of freight and passenger traffic.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): You don't want to listen.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. May we have order, please. The Chair will recognize the hon. member for a last supplementary question, following which I suggest we should move to the next subject.

Mr. Lundrigan: Mr. Speaker, perhaps on motions tomorrow the minister might make a statement to help clear up this matter. I should like to direct this question to the Minister of National Defence. In view of the fact that three Hercules aircraft airlifting freight for approximately seven days managed to clean up about half of what is normally shipped by sea in one day, and in view of the fact that some of this freight was cement which we export from Corner Brook to the mainland and it was flown back again to Newfoundland, would the minister be willing to authorize a serious effort to put on eight or ten Hercules for two or three weeks in order that Newfoundland children can expect Santa Claus to arrive at least before the middle of February? I ask this as a serious question and not as a political show.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lundrigan: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister did not indicate an intention to reply to the question by the hon. member. The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe.

An hon. Member: It was another minister.

Oral Questions

Mr. Speaker: I apologize to the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe. I must admit that I was looking at the wrong minister. Perhaps the Minister of National Defence might be allowed to answer the question put by the hon. member for Gander-Twillingate.

Hon. James Richardson (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I should like to say to the hon. member that the Department of National Defence has made a very serious effort. I suggest that 74 flights represents a lot of flying. We are operating under the guidance and direction of the Department of Transport in respect to this airlift. As I said in my reply a moment ago, we are willing to put on more planes if they can help in these circumstances.

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EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

ARAB-ISRAELI WAR—POSSIBLE SUPPLYING OF ARMS BY CHINESE—SUGGESTED DISCUSSION BY PRIME MINISTER WITH CHINESE GOVERNMENT

Mr. Claude Wagner (Saint-Hyacinthe): Mr. Speaker, my question is addressed to the Acting Prime Minister. In view of reports to the effect that Chinese arms are being used by certain guerilla groups in the mid-east, can the Acting Prime Minister inform the House whether the Prime Minister, while in Peking, will discuss these reports?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the reports I have had of the discussions between the Prime Minister and the leaders of the Chinese government—I think the House will agree that these discussions have gone very well and that the non-partisan, warm reception given the Prime Minister indicates the high regard of the people of China for Canada and Canadians—are to the effect that the Prime Minister discussed the Middle East situation with both Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai. When the Prime Minister returns I am sure he will be happy to answer this question.

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NORTHERN AFFAIRS

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES—CONDITION OF HIGHWAY BETWEEN ENTERPRISE AND HAY RIVER

Mr. Wally Firth (Northwest Territories): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. In view of the fact that eight to ten people have lost their lives in car accidents on a very bad section of the Northwest Territories highway between Enterprise and Hay River, will the minister advise the House if and when this dangerous situation will be corrected?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, I am aware of that and I have asked the officials of the department to see what could be done to improve the situation. However, it