

Inquiries of the Ministry

Mr. Valade: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion referred the question I asked him to the Minister of Finance for an answer. It is a very specific question concerning the minimum amount of employment that is going to be created by the \$68 million to be applied to the auto route in Montreal. That is the question I asked and which was referred to the minister.

Mr. Benson: Mr. Speaker, again I point out that the question was answered yesterday at page 2545 of *Hansard*.

Mr. Valade: In that case—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

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UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**ELIMINATION OF DELAY IN PAYMENT OF CLAIMS**

Mr. W. B. Nesbitt (Oxford): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Labour. Would the minister get in touch with the heads of the Unemployment Insurance Commission and see if he can do something to cut, untie or burn the massive administrative red tape which is delaying the payment of unemployment insurance claims at the present time?

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for bringing this question to the attention of the House because it is one that is receiving much publicity these days. I met with officials of the Unemployment Insurance Commission this morning and found out that over 97 per cent of the claims are processed on time, which is a tremendous improvement over the situation two years ago. I know this is of little consolation to those involved in the 3 per cent of claims which are not always processed on time, but in 90 per cent of those cases the fault does not lie with the commission but with the employers or employees.

Mr. Nesbitt: Mr. Speaker, would the minister have further consultation with the commission and find out what they mean by "on time"? There is a great difference of opinion on that matter.

USE OF IMPREST ACCOUNTS BY OFFICES

Mr. A. D. Hales (Wellington): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a supplementary question to the Minister of Labour. In regard to those cases where delay has been caused by errors made by the officials in the unemployment insurance offices, would the minister not consider giving these offices an imprest account on which they could write cheques immediately rather than have to go through the area offices?

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, the suggestion is a very helpful one. It is being considered in light of the new legislation coming forward, and particularly closer relations with the welfare

[Mr. Benson.]

officers in many communities. It might be of interest to the House to know that last year we took to court and prosecuted 186 employers who callously held up the records of their employees, presumably causing intentional hardship to their employees. We have not hesitated to take legal action and have prosecuted—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

TORONTO—REPORTED DELAY IN PAYMENT OF CLAIMS

Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Hastings): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a supplementary question to the minister. I asked him several days ago if he would look into the situation in Toronto, which was widely reported in the Toronto press, concerning delays in the payment of claims. Has he looked into these cases, and what is the result?

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I have looked into these cases and I would rather table the report or perhaps make a statement on motions later in the week. The hon. gentleman is quite familiar with the co-operation that is usually extended to him, particularly in his own riding, by officials of the Unemployment Insurance Commission, and I know he would be the last in the House to complain about their efficiency.

Mr. Hees: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the way that the minister has usually handled these cases. That is why I found it hard to understand the delays in Toronto.

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INDUSTRY**MAINTENANCE OF OPERATION OF McBEAN COAL MINE**

Mr. Robert Muir (Cape Breton-The Sydneys): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. Can he advise the House of the results of the meeting he had a few days ago with the Nova Scotia mines minister with a view to keeping the McBean coal mine in operation? May I also ask the minister whether he shares the view expressed by the Nova Scotia mines minister, namely, that he is totally behind the idea of keeping this mine open?

Hon. J. J. Greene (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, there is no decision in that regard yet. As the hon. member knows, the Donald report indicated that the McBean mine was not economically viable. With the increase in coal prices it may be that that decision should be reviewed. My department is in the process of considering the representations made by the Minister of Mines from Nova Scotia at the present time.

Mr. Muir: Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that the mine is scheduled to be closed in March, and in view of the fact that every second person in the Atlantic region is unemployed at the moment, will the minister do his utmost to see that this mine continues to operate?