

HOUSE OF COMMONS

PRESENCE IN GALLERY OF PRESIDENT OF CANADIAN CANCER SOCIETY

Mr. Speaker: I wish to draw to Members' attention the presence in our gallery of Dr. Gweneth Ballantine, President of the Canadian Cancer Society, and her executive, with a special guest, Mr. Steven Fonyo.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

* * *

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

TREATMENT OF LAID-OFF CANADA PACKERS PLANT WORKERS

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. When the amendments were introduced to the Unemployment Insurance Act dealing with severance benefits the Minister was careful to assure the House that all laid-off workers would be given exactly the same treatment.

Is the Minister aware that in the lay-off of 350 workers at the Canada Packers plant on Friday there was a major distinction between salaried workers, who have privileges to receive their UI benefits early, and hourly workers, who must wait several months before they will be eligible?

In light of that inequity will the Minister take steps now to ensure that the hourly workers at the Canada Packers plant, and other workers affected by the same situation, will not be treated in this unfair way and will be able to get their severance and UI benefits on a basis equal to that of all other workers?

[Translation]

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, it is the first I hear about this. I shall take the question as notice and check to see whether or not the Hon. Member is right. If anything can be done, we shall take immediate action.

[English]

Mr. Axworthy: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister for responding. I hope that will be done in an expeditious way because the workers have in fact been laid off.

PROGRAM TO ASSIST OLDER WORKERS

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the same Minister. His colleague, the Minister of Labour, was quoted as saying on the weekend that they are near to making an agreement on a major program to assist older workers. The Minister is aware that the Government cancelled the Labour Adjustment Program which would have provided assistance to older workers.

Oral Questions

Since many older workers, including some at the Canada Packers plants, are now being left without benefits, can we get a guarantee from the Government that any proposal will grandfather benefits for older workers who were laid off during the interim between the cancellation of the Labour Adjustment Program and the introduction of the new legislation?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say first that the program was not cancelled. We were at the end of the program.

With regard to the other part of the question, the Minister of Labour is working at the present time toward an agreement with the 10 provinces on the new program for older workers. The Government has always been concerned about the relationship with the provinces and, unlike the former Government, it will continue to work with the provinces.

* * *

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS

CLOSURE OF MONCTON MAINTENANCE SHOPS—PAYMENTS TO FORMER EMPLOYEES

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport and is with regard to the CN shops at Moncton. CN's decision to shut the rail and shop operation at Moncton at a cost of 1,200 jobs was based on studies which supposedly show how much CN could save by closing down the operation.

Since these studies were done an arbitration award has confirmed contract rights for employees which will mean that by September, when the operation is finally shut down, CN will still have to pay over \$10 million a year—full pay—for up to 300 workers to stay home and do nothing until retirement.

Will the Minister instruct CN to make these so-called rationalization studies available to the employees and to the Transport Committee or, if the Minister has the studies himself, will he make those studies known to all of us?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, this matter has, of course, been discussed in the House many times. It is regrettable that CN had to take a decision to close the Moncton shops.

Mr. Rodriguez: You let them.

Mr. Crosbie: However, life changes—

Mr. Rodriguez: And so will the Government.

Mr. Crosbie: —as the railway industry has changed, and it was in the economic interests of CN, unfortunately, to close those shops.