

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the Hon. Member that, because of his representations, his repeated representations, and again on the recommendations of the mediator on the James Bay Agreement, the Government of Canada will be pleased to contribute \$3.8 million to the Waswanipi school. I want to say that that will bring to \$20 million the contributions to school facilities for the James Bay Cree in the last five years.

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[Translation]

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS

CN WORKSHOPS AT POINTE-SAINT-CHARLES—CAR
RENOVATION CONTRACT—MINISTER'S POSITION

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport and concerns the CN workshops at Point St. Charles in Montreal and VIA Rail's \$85 million contract for refitting its railway cars. Will the Minister admit that the jobs of 485 employees, one-third of the work force at the shops, will be threatened if the VIA Rail contract is not awarded to the shops, and that the economy of southwest Montreal will be dealt another severe blow?

Does the Government intend to maintain the shops at Point St. Charles which has the infrastructure and the human resources? If so, what does the government intend to do to ensure VIA Rail awards this very important contract to the CN shops?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, the question is much longer than its content warrants. VIA Rail has called for bids on a contract for refitting some of the company's equipment. Bids have been called. As is usual for Crown corporations, Via Rail will evaluate the bids it receives and will award the contract to the company that meets its requirements. I don't think it is necessary to start some kind of big debate on the situation of CN in Point-St. Charles. We will simply wait and see what VIA Rail decides to do, and I imagine it will follow the standard procedure.

IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING WORKSHOPS OPEN IN MONTREAL

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Is the Minister aware of the fact that one-third of the work force at the shops in Point St. Charles will be affected, depending on whether or not the contract is awarded to the CN shops? And does he also realize that employees are very upset about the Government's decision to let CN close its shops in Moncton? Could the Government give the House the assurance that it intends to maintain the shops at Point St. Charles or does the Government intend to let the shops in Montreal be closed down as they were in Moncton?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I understand that bids have been made by companies with workers in Quebec and in Ontario. I also understand it is typical of the New Democrats to say just about anything off the top of their heads. In fact, the matter is very straightforward. The company will award the contract to a business that has employees in Canada, in Quebec or Ontario. I suppose that if they decide to award the contract to CN workers in Point St. Charles, two days from now the Hon. Member will rise in the House to ask why the contract wasn't awarded to the workers at Bombardier, in Saint-Anne-de-la-Pocatière. I don't think this makes an impression anymore.

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[English]

BANKS AND BANKING

CHARTERED BANKS' SERVICE CHARGES—EFFECT OF
COMPETITION ACT

Mr. W. Paul McCrossan (York-Scarborough): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. I would like to thank the Minister for agreeing that his officials would not prohibit banks from agreeing to minimum consumer service and disclosure standards. However, David Makin, head of the financial markets at the Competition Bureau, alleged last week that by agreeing to offer certain basic banking services for free, banks could be charged with price fixing.

Is the Minister seriously suggesting that if all banks agree to charge nothing for a basic banking service, the bankers could be fined or jailed for price fixing?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, absolutely not. The Competition Act is there to help consumers, and I was objecting last week to what appeared to me to be the bankers' association hiding behind the Competition Act or using it as an excuse not to act in the consumer's benefit.

There are provisions under the Act whereby the banks could get an advance ruling from the head of the Competition Bureau if they have a plan in mind and if they have questions about whether it is allowable under the Act. Further, if in fact through some technicality, they might be precluded from acting, I would certainly be more than willing to recommend that my colleague change the Bank Act or to bring forward changes to the Competition Act to make sure that could happen. I would like to see those service charges reduced, and I do not think there are obstacles in the law to the banks acting to reduce them now.