

Oral Questions

in Parliament, namely the ridings of Joliette and Berthier-Maskinongé.

Hon. Roch La Salle (Minister of Supply and Services): With great pleasure, Mr. Speaker, I would say to my hon. colleague that as early as on the morning of May 23, I discussed this with the minister in charge who understood the importance of my representations. I would also like to say to the hon. member for Berthier-Maskinongé that I have been looking after the riding of Joliette for a long time.

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[English]

LABOUR RELATIONS

RAILWAYS—PENSIONS OF RETIRING EMPLOYEES

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question could be addressed to the Minister of Labour, whose department fathered the Hall report on railways pensions in Canada, or it could be addressed to the Minister of Transport, who is the link between us and the railways of this country. I trust that the Minister of Labour will not mind if I put the question to the Minister of Transport.

In view of the fact that nothing substantial has been done by way of improving the pensions of the retired employees of either Canadian National or Canadian Pacific since the publication of the Hall report, may I ask the Minister of Transport if, since his coming into office, he has made representations to Canadian National and to Canadian Pacific that they at least carry out the recommendations of that report. If he has not done so yet, will he do so at the earliest possible date?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that that matter is being considered. I have taken into account the representations which the hon. member made to me personally, and I have also taken into account the representations of the hon. member for Winnipeg-Assiniboine. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre did indicate that he wanted to meet with me privately on this matter, and I have indicated that I would be prepared to do so. I am still prepared to do so, and I assure the hon. member that we will continue looking into this matter. Hopefully, we can arrive at a satisfactory resolution which will be in the best interests of railway pensioners.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Speaker, when the minister makes his representations to the railways, even though the Hall commission did not deal with this aspect, will he take up with them the unfairness of the present provision whereby the widow of a retired railway worker receives only 50 per cent of the pension when, surely, that ought to be 75 per cent or more?

Mr. Mazankowski: Mr. Speaker, it would be my intention to consider all such items, and I look forward to our meeting at which time I can discuss these matters with the hon. member as I have with the hon. member for Winnipeg-Assiniboine.

[Mr. Yanakis.]

[Translation]

TRANSPORT

RAILWAY SERVICE BETWEEN MONTREAL AND CHICOUTIMI

Mr. Marcel Dionne (Chicoutimi): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport. An amount of \$43 million is being added to the \$234 million provided for in the main estimates to cover a review of the financing of passenger train service. Can the minister tell the House whether, following a complaint lodged by the Quebec transport department against VIA Rail and the CN about the poor service being provided between Montreal and Chicoutimi, progress has been made on that and if our area can count on those few millions to improve the passenger train service to which we are entitled?

[English]

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, as I said in the House yesterday, it is not necessarily a matter of dollars and cents that could improve the rail service in this country; it is a matter of rationalizing the rail passenger service and ensuring that the best possible service is made available to meet the regional and local needs as well as the transcontinental needs.

I invite the hon. member, if he has specific questions with respect to that particular service, to come to the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications this afternoon when the president of VIA Rail will be before the committee, and he can pose those questions to him.

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TOURISM

STEPS TO REDUCE TRADE DEFICIT

Mr. Roy MacLaren (Etobicoke North): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of State for International Trade who is also responsible for tourism. The government announced earlier this week that, contrary to expectations, it would contribute only 25 per cent of the cost for a new convention centre in metro Toronto.

In view of the fact that our tourism and travel accounts are major factors in our trade deficit, and that the new convention centre would increase travel to and within Canada, will the government reconsider its position and increase its portion to 33 per cent of the total cost of the centre, as in the case of Vancouver, as a tangible step toward reducing our trade deficit?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of State for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question because it gives me an opportunity to address this particular problem. The question of convention travel is a very important part of our tourism trade and has a very important impact on our balance of payments.

However, on the question of our policy toward convention centres in Canada, we had to establish a rational basis for