

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: I have time for one question more by the hon. member for Fraser Valley West.

* * *

HOUSING

REQUEST THAT MORTGAGE RATES BE REDUCED

Mr. Bob Wenman (Fraser Valley West): Madam Speaker, interest rates are breaking families not only economically but, equally as important, they are breaking families socially. People are losing their families and their homes by being forced to take third and even fourth jobs to meet the increased rates.

Since the government claims that our interest rates must float around United States interest rates, will the government reduce mortgage interest rates to bring them into line with United States interest rates which are currently 3 per cent to 5 per cent lower than in Canada? Will the minister responsible for housing answer that question?

Hon. Paul J. Cosgrove (Minister of Public Works): Madam Speaker, I believe that the Minister of Finance has addressed that question in his answers this afternoon. I would like to repeat part of my answer earlier pertaining to housing, that I am aware of the difficulties that are being faced by families. I have received representations not only in Ottawa, not only in this forum, but in forums right across the country. I have had the opportunity in the last couple of months to meet with people in every province. I am fully aware of the difficulties being faced by Canadians.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

MR. BENJAMIN—ABANDONMENT OF RAIL SERVICES BY ORDER IN COUNCIL

Madam Speaker: I have notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin).

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Madam Speaker, the matter of which I gave you notice is one that I sincerely believe affects the rights and privileges of all members and infringes on and violates my privileges as a member of this place. It concerns order in council 1981-2171 which orders the abandonment of several passenger train services across Canada.

Madam Speaker, I am not here to ask you to judge the legality or illegality of the actions of the government; I am here to ask you to find a prima facie case of privilege. Based on the actions of the government, whether legal or illegal, my privileges have been infringed upon.

I will briefly cite three schedules in the order in council and then state my question of privilege, which is in three parts.

Privilege—Mr. Benjamin

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I would prefer it if the hon. member would state his question of privilege immediately; he can talk about the schedules later if there is a prima facie case. He must go immediately to why he feels his privilege has been abused.

Mr. Benjamin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My question of privilege is the following. Since order in council 1981-2171 overrides legislation of provinces and this Parliament, my privilege in carrying out my legislative duties has been violated because I am prevented by this order in council from asking for and obtaining a hearing before the Canadian Transport Commission on VIA Rail passenger routes ordered abandoned by the order in council. The law provides for such hearings. The order in council prevents it.

The legislature of British Columbia in 1910 ratified an agreement with the Canadian Northern Railway which said in part that, in exchange for property and timber rights, the company was bound by statute to maintain a regular daily first-class passenger and freight service between Victoria and Jasper. I would like to be able to present that case before the Canadian Transport Commission. The order in council prevents me from doing that.

Second, the order in council permits the government to take these actions without presenting legislation to which I could speak or endeavour to amend or improve or defeat. Also, the Canadian Transport Commission previously held hearings at which I and other hon. members appeared and ruled that 15 of these 21 routes ordered abandoned by the government in their order in council be retained.

I have no way of getting at this fiat in Parliament through the statutes or government legislation, or even through a private member's bill, certainly not in this session of Parliament. I can only do this through questions or debate which the government can, and will, ignore. I cannot appeal or attempt to amend, defeat or even approve legislation which violates legislation in several of the provinces and in the Parliament of Canada. I submit, Madam Speaker, that this impinges not only on the integrity of this place but on the individual rights of an hon. member.

In 1882 the Quebec legislature ratified an agreement with the CPR in which the province conveyed to the CPR ownership of the Quebec-Montreal-Ottawa and Occidental Railway.

● (1520)

Madam Speaker: Order please. I am afraid I have to interrupt the hon. member. It seems to me quite obvious from what he has said that he does not have a prima facie case of privilege. I must remind him to look at Beauséjour and realize for himself that if he is not satisfied with the manner in which the government has undertaken a certain action, that does not constitute a question of privilege. The dissatisfaction of the hon. member deals with an interpretation of the laws and statutes, and the hon. member of course knows that I am not able to interpret the laws and statutes. There is a difference in interpretation, I can see that; but it is not for me to determine