

Oral Questions

at the same time at which we bring forward the establishment of rates for the coming year.

PREMIUM RATES

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Madam Speaker, I assume the Government has had consultations with the other two partners in the unemployment insurance scheme, namely, employee and employer representatives. If so, is the Government satisfied, following those consultations, that a further substantial premium increase can now be absorbed on top of last year's substantial increase, without curtailing job creation? That is the question which the Government has to address.

Hon. John Roberts (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, the consultations to which the Hon. Member refers have indeed taken place. I will be making recommendations to Cabinet very shortly about what the levels should be for the forthcoming year.

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● (1440)

HUMAN RIGHTS

PAKISTAN—DETENTION OF TARIQ ASHAN

Mrs. Ursula Appolloni (York South-Weston): Madam Speaker, in the absence of the Secretary of State for External Affairs I would like to address my question to the Minister of State for External Relations.

On Tuesday of this week Carleton University held a benefit for Tariq Ahsan, a Ph.D. student who has been a political prisoner in his homeland for approximately 24 months. It was fully 16 months before a charge was brought against Mr. Ahsan, and he still awaits trial for a charge unrelated in any way to violence or sedition. He is what one non-governmental organization terms a "prisoner of conscience". I know the Secretary of State for External Affairs is aware of this case. Could the Minister tell us what measures the Canadian Government is undertaking on behalf of this gentleman, and, by extension, all citizens of the world who are incarcerated without the assurance of a prompt and fair trial?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of State (External Relations)): Madam Speaker, I am also familiar with the matter. Given the state of international law today, it is not possible for the Government to intervene in a foreign country on behalf of non-Canadian citizens. This is one of those instances. The only thing we can do, and we do it in the framework of bilateral relationships with Pakistan, is dialogue with officials of that country regularly on matters of common interest. Human rights is one of those. We have done that repeatedly. The Secretary of State for External Affairs on his last visit to that country had conversations on that subject at the highest level. The Department is continuing these efforts. The case of this gentleman, Mr. Ahsan, has been talked about.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

NICARAGUA—UNITED STATES INVOLVEMENT IN CIVIL STRIFE

Miss Pauline Jewett (New Westminster-Coquitlam): Madam Speaker, in the absence of the Secretary of State for External Affairs perhaps I could direct my question to the Prime Minister. I had not realized that the Minister would be leaving for his meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Shultz this soon.

In light of the bombing raids inside Nicaragua last month, with at least one plane being provided by the CIA, and the combined air and sea attack on Nicaragua's main oil port this week by the CIA-backed group FDN, does the Prime Minister know if the Secretary of State for External Affairs, in his meeting with Secretary of State Shultz this weekend, plans to discuss our very grave concern about the growing number of CIA-backed attempts to cripple the economy of Nicaragua and ultimately overthrow its Government?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of State (External Relations)): Madam Speaker, the subject of sending arms to Central America has been condemned by us on a number of occasions, the last time by the Secretary of State for External Affairs at the UN General Assembly meeting. I do not know specifically if that particular point will come up in the discussion to be held tomorrow or the day after between Secretary Shultz and our Secretary of State for External Affairs, but I think so. I will make sure and I will call my friend this afternoon.

Miss Jewett: Would the Minister or the Prime Minister get in touch with the Secretary of State specifically on the CIA-backed attacks? That is what I was asking about.

EXTENSION OF CREDIT BY CANADA

Miss Pauline Jewett (New Westminster-Coquitlam): Madam Speaker, would the Minister of State for External Relations be able to inform the House today whether the Government has now approved its pledge of an \$18 million line of credit to Nicaragua?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of State (External Relations)): I am not too sure. I am sorry, I am a new man in the game.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pepin: I saw a report on that subject. I will make sure and communicate this afternoon with my hon. friend.

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SPECIAL RECOVERY CAPITAL PROJECTS PROGRAM

NEW BRUNSWICK PROJECTS

Mr. Bob Corbett (Fundy-Royal): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of State for Economic Develop-