

Oral Questions

oughly evaluated and monitored over the next ten years, so as to make sure the system becomes more competitive and that the overcharges of hundreds of millions of dollars will be eliminated or dramatically reduced?

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Bussières (Minister of State (Finance)): Madam Speaker, unfortunately I did not have time to look at the report to which the hon. member is referring. However I know that he did have opportunities along with his colleagues to participate in the debate on the banking legislation review and surely he will recall that one of the main objectives of that new statute was to make room for more competition by authorizing foreign banks to open branches in Canada and start banking operations. I believe that the growth and popularity of such institutions as caisses populaires and the arrival of foreign banks will spur competition in our banking system and that will appreciably improve its efficiency.

[English]

Mr. Riis: Madam Speaker, perhaps the report of the Economic Council of Canada, which indicated these excessive charges, ought to have been made public and brought to the attention of members of the House during debate on the revisions to the Bank Act. Recognizing that that did not take place, my supplementary question is this. Will the minister indicate whether the government plans to introduce legislation this year which will allow trust companies and credit unions to compete more effectively with the chartered banks, especially in the area of providing loans and services to small businesses?

[Translation]

Mr. Bussières: Madam Speaker, in so far as the caisses populaires are concerned, it will be recalled that the banking legislation was reviewed recently and passed by the House and I think that under Part III the caisses populaires and credit unions were authorized to join the Canadian Payments Association, thereby finding themselves on an equal footing with chartered banks to offer a wider range of services to all their customers and to all Canadians as well. That is what I meant when I said that the caisses populaires would spur competition within the banking system and make it more efficient.

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[English]

POST OFFICE**SPECIAL MAILING PRIVILEGES FOR WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS**

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Postmaster General. In view of the importance of the weekly newspapers to Canadians and the concern being expressed by publishers and owners of these papers that their special mailing privileges which they have traditionally enjoyed may be lost when the Post Office becomes a Crown corporation, can the Postmaster General assure the House that these special privileges for these important means of communi-

cation will be continued after the Post Office becomes a Crown corporation?

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, the answer is yes. The hon. member should know that a few years ago the Secretary of State and the Post Office Department signed an agreement under which we can indeed subsidize the postal rates granted Canadian magazines, newspapers and periodicals. Nothing indicates that the agreement will be cancelled. On the contrary the spirit of the agreement remains the same and I believe it will most certainly endure after the Post Office Department has become a Crown corporation.

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[English]

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS**CN EXPRESS—MAINTENANCE OF SERVICE IN ATLANTIC PROVINCES**

Mr. Tom McMillan (Hillsborough): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport. Last week in the House, I think it was on Friday, despite an earlier decision by Canadian National to close its express terminals in Charlottetown and in Sydney, he announced that the government has now decided to keep those terminals open. Will the minister tell the House how many CN Express employees will be kept in the two centres? Could he also tell the House what level of service will be maintained in those two express terminals which were originally scheduled to be closed and will now be kept open?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, I have a letter going to members who represent the area. However, I had to look at it again because there were a few commas in the wrong place.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pepin: The short answer is that it will be local services. The office and the warehouse will be maintained both in Sydney and in Charlottetown. The employment level will be at about half what it is now, that is, 19 people in Charlottetown and 25 in Sydney. That will be guaranteed for a period of two and a half years from now.

Mr. McMillan: Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is also for the Minister of Transport. Does the minister realize there has been a steady withdrawal of CN operations from the Atlantic region, and that the loss of this essential part of the transportation system in that region is causing severe economic hardship? Will the minister assure the House that the decision to keep open the CN Express terminals in Sydney and Charlottetown will not be at the expense of services and jobs in some other part of the operation of Canadian National in the Atlantic region?