

the railroad to withdraw from the transportation of this product.

I would like to ask the Minister of Transport: does the Department of Transport or the Canadian Transport Commission allow the Canadian railroad system or any of its members to withdraw service from a customer or group of customers who have been historically dependent on the railroad for transportation of a particular commodity, and does the Department of Transport or the Canadian Transport Commission have authority to order continued service when railroads arbitrarily withdraw such a service?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Transport and Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member not only seeks a legal opinion but a fairly complex one, as it is a complex question. I will be glad to take note of the question in written form and attempt to obtain an answer for the hon. member.

Mr. McCain: Mr. Speaker, when railroad service is withdrawn from a captive industry such as the New Brunswick potato industry, can the industry concerned appeal to the Canadian Transport Commission, the Department of Transport or any other agency of government on the basis of economic hardship to the industry and region concerned?

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, I think that I will apply my first answer to the second question as well.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

NEW FIGHTER PLANES FOR NATO FORCE

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, my question was originally to be directed to the Minister of National Defence, but in his absence it is appropriately addressed to the Prime Minister.

The group of experts reviewing the choice of suppliers for the proposed new fighter planes to be substituted for the Voodoos in the defence of North America and to be used in support of ground troops in Europe under NATO were to report to the cabinet in September. Has this group reported to the cabinet, and when will the cabinet make a decision on the matter, bearing in mind the urgent necessity for cutting back on the more than \$2 billion involved in the purchase?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, that matter was discussed in cabinet last June and I do not believe it has returned to cabinet since. It may have been discussed in a committee of ministers: I do not think that it has, but I am not certain. I could inquire of the Minister of National Defence, who is in Toronto meeting with the minister of defence from Norway.

Mr. Brewin: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Prime Minister will also want to refer this question to the Minister of National Defence. My question is: can it be stated in general terms what

Oral Questions

proportion of the proposed new fighter planes would be used in Europe and what proportion would be used in North America?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, this is part of the problem. We were looking at a plane which would be multipurpose and could be used in Europe and Canada. This is part of the problem we are looking at. I cannot answer the question, because I do not know, as I just indicated, what the present submissions are, if any, that have been made to the minister.

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HEALTH AND WELFARE

POLICY REGARDING EXTENDED USE OF SOCIAL INSURANCE NUMBERS

Mr. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon-Biggar): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of the Minister of National Health and Welfare: it is the same question that I asked her last Friday when she became rather agitated. I think the hon. member misunderstood the question.

I would like to know, in view of the fact the government has obviously broken its word with respect to the expansion of social insurance numbers over and above social security programs, what steps it is taking to restrict its ever-expanding use of those numbers and, equally important, what the government is doing to prevent information obtained by the social insurance programs from going to other departments not under the aegis of social security programs.

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, the adjectives that I saw used in some press reports described my actions from agitated, to shaky and pale, to spirited. I will not be the judge of my actions. I do know that the answer I gave was addressing the point raised in a most responsible manner.

I would reiterate today that I would be playing the part of the ostrich which puts its head in the sand to pretend that the use of the social insurance number will not grow, because our population is growing and our social programs have expanded greatly in the past ten years.

The hon. member is probably also referring to the fact that the child tax credit bill presently being studied by the House requires the use of the taxation machinery and will require that people have a social insurance number. I do not understand why this procedure is so wrong. I would like the hon. member to stop making innuendoes about a breach of policy, because it does not exist. Would he please state exactly what his objection is and why he objects?

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Mr. Speaker, I do not think that the minister understands the problem. I am not talking about social security programs.

Miss Bégin: Then why do you direct your question to me?

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Because social insurance numbers are under the minister's responsibility.