

• (1440)

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs): Madam Speaker, the present circumstance is that the Soviet authorities have not formally requested permission to come down in Gander for any flight. That is formally. I had intimation that they might have asked for permission for Mr. Gromyko en route to New York, but that was not dealt with because the request has not been made. But there have been no flights up to the present time, to my knowledge, and each of them will be dealt with on their merits since the number of flights is so limited that it does not seem to me to add materiality to the action we have taken at the present time.

The Hon. Member will also realize that we have suspended, or delayed, signing a memorandum of agreement between the Government of Canada and the Soviet authorities with respect to the future use of Gander as a refuelling base. That action itself has rather adversely affected the future prospects, at least for the moment, for Gander. In the circumstances I feel that I have taken sufficient action with respect to Gander to demonstrate the attitude of the Government of Canada.

With respect to the compensation, I do not think that this will be an issue that will be quickly resolved. There are countries such as the United States, Canada, and South Korea, that are all making the same claims against the Soviet Union. I have explained to the Hon. Member the steps that I have already taken. If there are further steps that would prove to be effective in order to secure compensation for the families affected, then I would be prepared to consider those steps.

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INDUSTRY

WHITE FARM EQUIPMENT LTD.—FUTURE OF COMPANY

Mr. Derek Blackburn (Brant): Madam Speaker, my question is addressed to the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce and it concerns the White Farm situation. He indicated in a previous answer this afternoon that negotiations had been going on yesterday and were going on at the present time. I want him to know that not only I but the vast majority of workers at White Farm do not want TIC to regain control of that company. They had nothing but one fiasco after another for two years while TIC owned it.

Why is a viable company such as Linamar Machines of Guelph, which was a former minority owner, not upfront in the bidding and not being encouraged by the Minister, his Department or his officials, to submit an acceptable bid to take over the company and make sure it remains Canadian, operating in Canada, and in Brantford?

Hon. Ed Lumley (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce and Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Madam Speaker, I am not aware of all of the details of each of the offers, but my understanding from the receiver is that there were deficiencies in each one of the offers. The company

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which the Hon. Member suggests would certainly be acceptable to the Government of Canada as long as it wanted to undertake the three criteria that we basically have recommended to the receiver which are; one, operating it as a going concern; two, making valuable use of that leading edge technology; and three, protecting the dealer network.

If there is another offer of which we are not aware, we would be happy to have a look at it. I know that the receiver, who has been very co-operative in this whole process, would be most interested in looking at any offer coming forward from any company.

MONEYS OWED TO EMPLOYEES

Mr. Derek Blackburn (Brant): Madam Speaker, the Government guaranteed 90 per cent of the loans from the banks to the White Farm Equipment Company to keep its head above water. TIC owes the workers on average anywhere from \$4,000 to \$8,000 in back pay, vacation pay, other fringe benefits, and severance pay. If the company should go into liquidation—and it does appear as if it is heading in that direction—will the Government give the same guarantee to the employees that it gave to the banks? Why not have equal justice for all in a situation like this where 900 employees may very well be turfed out onto the street with no money whatsoever and no recompense whatsoever?

Hon. Ed Lumley (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce and Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): First, Madam Speaker, like the Hon. Member, we hope that liquidation will not be necessary. Second, with respect to the money owed the employees, if I am not mistaken I think that the receiver is under some obligation and has funds to pay things like vacation pay. Under the Bankruptcy Act, the directors are responsible for salaries owed to employees and the Enterprise Development Board which reports to the Government of Canada through the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce has a representative on the board. Thus we are partly responsible for those salaries, and I am confident that any moneys owing to the employees will be resolved.

I might just add that my colleague, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, has talked about the Bankruptcy Act being a Government priority whereby workers will be treated as secured creditors. I would hope that every Member in the House will be supportive of changing the Bankruptcy Act in this regard.

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SENATE REFORM

ATTENDANCE OF LIBERAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister and it is based on the fact that out of six members of the Joint Committee of the Commons and the Senate reviewing the Senate reform question, out of the six Liberal Members of the Commons who