

Oral Questions

Hon. John N. Turner (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the Minister of State for Urban Affairs, is in western Canada attending a tri-level conference dealing with this type of problem, and he has already stated the percentage of loans available under preferred NHA rates. In terms of the detail of that question, I will convey it to my colleague.

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TRANSPORT

BACKLOG OF FREIGHT AT NORTH SYDNEY—SUGGESTED USE OF ARGENTIA-NORTH SYDNEY FERRY ON YEAR-ROUND BASIS

Mr. Walter C. Carter (St. John's West): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport. In view of the fact the Canadian government is unable to cope with the freight backlog at Sydney bound for Newfoundland, would the minister give consideration to having the Argentia-North Sydney ferry continue on a year-round basis as recommended by groups of people in that area and other bodies in Newfoundland?

Hon. Jean Marchand (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I think the premise is wrong, but probably this is the normal way of putting a question to a minister. We have been looking at all possibilities in order to get rid of this backlog, which existed last year and on which I did not even receive one letter from the opposition. Notwithstanding that, we are going to look into all possibilities, including the one mentioned by the hon. member.

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[Translation]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

ESTABLISHMENT OF REGIONAL OFFICES IN QUEBEC— DELAY IN PAYMENT OF BENEFITS

Mr. Gilles Caouette (Charlevoix): Mr. Speaker, I should like to put a question to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration.

In view of the many problems that occurred last year at the Unemployment Insurance Commission, the minister informed us this summer that regional offices favouring decentralization would be set up this very fall in areas such as the north shore and the riding of Charlevoix, among others.

Mr. La Salle: In Joliette too.

Mr. Caouette (Charlevoix): Also in Joliette, for instance. In view of the fact that since September the Unemployment Insurance Commission has been at grips with delays such as have been experienced last year, can the minister say when the offices whose construction was announced last summer will be set up and when the operation will begin?

[English]

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I should like to separate that into the general and the specific. If the hon. member can

[Mr. Broadbent.]

give me some specifics I will look into those, but in general I think progress toward completing the reorganization of, or the so-called new approach to, unemployment insurance has been done with dispatch. It was started in April, accelerated in August and will be generally completed around the first of December. I commend the commission for their vigour.

[Translation]

Mr. Caouette (Charlevoix): Mr. Speaker, I should like to put a supplementary question.

Without generalizing, could the minister explain why people in the Quebec City area have been waiting since the beginning of September for their unemployment insurance benefits?

[English]

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, I do not think I could be that general, but I would be happy to deal with specifics. If the hon. member will give me some case histories we will move very quickly on them.

PROJECTED BENEFIT AND ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS FOR 1973

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration as a supplementary. Given the optimism of the Minister of Finance respecting growth for the balance of the year and knowing that the government must have some projections in terms of employment and unemployment, can the minister advise whether he has any projected figures for the cost both of benefits and administration for the year 1973? Or can he assure us, because of this optimism, that the total cost will be less this year than it was last year?

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I think I answered a somewhat similar question two or three weeks ago in which I indicated there are offsets. There is the rise granted by statute in the eligible income due to the increase in the average wage rate, which has an effect on the average cost per week of benefits. There is the factor of the length of time on benefits, there is the maturity of the plan in terms of maternity benefits and sickness benefits, and so on. The question cannot be answered either yes or no; anyone who thinks there is a simplistic approach like that is mistaken.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. At this point I bring to the attention of hon. members that there are only three or four minutes until the end of the question period.

Mr. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I have one short supplementary question. Apparently there are no figures and I think the cost is going to be much higher, but let me ask the minister this. Is it the intention of the government to introduce by way of regulation an increase in employer-employee contributions? I have read it will be something like 50 per cent. Is that a fact?

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, if such policy is determined it will be announced in the regular manner.