

● (1417)

Does that ministerial or departmental order include information that traditionally has been available to the criminal investigation branch in the process of investigating unemployment insurance frauds, normally at the request of the department? In other words, is that blanket on information all-inclusive, or is there an exclusion where a criminal investigation officer may still get that information in order to build up a case for prosecution of a fraud charge?

Hon. Bud Cullen (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question and the opportunity to clear up that point. I thought I had done that in press reports and in the House. No, it is not a blanket closing off. The information will be made available for the administration of the UI Act, whether it is to catch those who perpetrate fraud or having to do with social insurance numbers. Having regard to anybody who might be doing something wrong in that particular region of the administration of social insurance numbers, the information will, of course, be made available to the RCMP which, incidentally, has been doing an excellent job on our behalf.

LEGALITY OF RCMP RECEIVING CONFIDENTIAL
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE INFORMATION

Mr. Bill Jarvis (Perth-Wilmot): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Solicitor General. Press reports indicate quite clearly that at least one assistant commissioner has indicated they will not receive that type of information in the process of investigating UI frauds, on the basis that if information supplied for the investigation of other alleged crimes would be a breach of confidentiality, then the supplying of information in respect of UI fraud would equally be a breach. I now understand that the order of the Minister of Employment and Immigration does not extend to UI fraud cases. Was that assistant commissioner quoted incorrectly, and is it the situation that the criminal investigation branch now will not receive that information in respect of UI fraud?

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, with reference to the latter part of the hon. gentleman's question, I can assure him it is not the policy of the RCMP not to discharge its responsibilities in exactly those terms identified by the Minister of Employment and Immigration. The RCMP is charged with enforcement of the UI Act and takes this responsibility very seriously. It obtains from the Department of Employment and Immigration such information as is required for the prosecution of these offences and the continuation of investigations.

With reference to the press reports, Mr. Speaker, I have not had the advantage of seeing the transcript of the evidence given before the McDonald inquiry and, therefore, cannot comment on the initial question of the hon. gentleman.

Oral Questions

LABOUR CONDITIONS

DISPUTES IN MEAT PACKING INDUSTRY

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I have questions for two ministers respecting the strike at Swift and the lockout by Canada Packers. My first question is directed to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. In view of the fact that the lockout by Canada Packers seems to be a case of acting in concert with a competitor, which could have a serious effect on the price of meat products, will the minister have his officials investigate this whole situation?

Hon. Warren Allmand (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): I have no information on that as yet, Mr. Speaker, but I will be pleased to follow up the suggestion made by the hon. member.

RECEIPT OF UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE BENEFITS BY
EMPLOYEES INVOLVED IN DISPUTES

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the assurance that this matter will be investigated. I hope the appearance of collusion will impress itself upon the minister.

My second question is directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration and also has to do with this situation. In view of reports that employees of Canada Packers are to be denied unemployment insurance even though their being out of work is not a result of their initiative but, rather, because of a lockout, will the minister look into this matter in the hope that justice will prevail and that the employees who are out of work, not through their own fault, will receive unemployment insurance?

● (1422)

Hon. Bud Cullen (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, the role of the commission in cases like this is to endeavour to remain as neutral as possible. When there is a lockout or a strike, unemployment insurance benefits are not paid. We probably abuse that neutrality to some extent by indicating that we will not pay mobility grants to individuals to move into those particular jobs. If a person takes a job at a plant that is on strike, or refuses to go into a plant that is on strike, he will not lose his unemployment insurance benefits. So to some extent we lean in favour of employees. But, of course, we have been criticized for this by the other side.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that the last amendments respecting unemployment insurance put the control of the administration directly in the hands of the department rather than in the hands of an independent commission, will the minister, as the head of that department, take a personal interest in this matter to see that these employees who are locked out are not denied the benefits to which they are entitled?

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, as the minister of the department, I have to take my responsibilities recognizing that contribu-