

Oral Questions

RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IN CHAD—REQUEST THAT REPORT OF CIDA BE REFERRED TO STANDING COMMITTEE

Mr. Donald W. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Mr. Speaker, my question is also addressed to the Secretary of State for External Affairs. In view of reports reaching Canada that there is a wave of religious persecution in Chad which may affect the future of our aid projects in that country, notably our food aid distribution program in the Sahel, would the minister agree to have the report of CIDA referred to the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence so that these and related matters might be examined to the full?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his suggestion and I will certainly give it consideration at an early date.

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TRANSPORT

RAILWAY BRANCH LINE ABANDONMENT—SUGGESTED EXTENSION OF FREEZE—CONSULTATION WITH PROVINCES ON FORMULA FOR COMPENSATION

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I should like to raise another freeze with the Minister of Transport. Is it the intention of the government to allow the freeze on railway branch line abandonment to expire at the end of December, or is it the intention to extend the freeze? If not, have any criteria been arrived at as to which, if any, branch lines are to be abandoned?

Hon. Jean Marchand (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, as far as branch lines are concerned, I hope the decision will be made this week.

Mr. Benjamin: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Is it the minister's intention to live up to the commitment made by the Minister of Justice that no branch line will be abandoned without the prior concurrence of the province concerned? In addition, has he or his department arrived at any agreement with the provinces on the formula for compensation to municipalities, departments of highways, farmers and so on, for the extra costs involved for them?

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member would prefer to have an answer from the Minister of Justice himself.

Mr. Benjamin: As my final supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister again whether he will agree to maintain the freeze both on freight rates and on branch line abandonment until such time as the costing information has been provided by the railways regarding freight rates, and until such time as the provinces concerned have reached agreement with the government on the abandonment of any branch lines?

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): Mr. Speaker, as far as the second part of the question is concerned, I still believe that the Minister of Justice should answer that. As far as the first part of the question is concerned, I do not think we should change the decision. I think there is a lot of

[Mr. MacEachen.]

misinterpretation concerning the lifting of the freeze. The west was complaining, and justly most of the time, of the inequities, anomalies, long haul and short haul rates and so on, but these anomalies were not related to the freeze at all. Therefore, I think it would be misleading the public to say that in maintaining the freeze we would correct such situations; these are going to be corrected in co-operation with the ministers of transport in the west.

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[Translation]

HOUSING

AVAILABILITY OF FIVE HUNDRED DOLLAR GRANT FOR RENOVATIONS

Mr. Eudore Allard (Rimouski): Mr. Speaker, I should like to put a question to the Minister of Finance.

Since repairs to a house are sometimes more or at least no less costly than the construction of a new one, has the minister thought of granting the \$500 rebate to owners of that category?

Hon. John N. Turner (Minister of Finance): I shall be able to deal with the matter when the House studies the bill, Mr. Speaker.

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[English]

TRADE

SUGAR—POSSIBLE CHANGE IN TRADING PATTERNS TO REDUCE PRICE

Mr. R. E. McKinley (Huron-Middlesex): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. In view of the fact that the agriculture secretary of the United States has recommended that the U.S. resume trading with Cuba to reduce the soaring price of sugar, does the minister foresee any changes in trading patterns in sugar for this country which would be helpful in bringing down the price of sugar to our consumers?

Hon. Alastair Gillespie (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, Canada's trading patterns with Cuba in particular have already changed very dramatically. I think last year something like 47,000 tons were imported by Canadian companies from Cuba. This year I think the estimate is very close to 97,000 tons.

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AGRICULTURE

SUGAR BEETS—POSSIBLE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF INDUSTRY

Mr. R. E. McKinley (Huron-Middlesex): Mr. Speaker, since that is quite a small percentage may I address a supplementary question to the Minister of Agriculture, who told me in reply to a question some time ago that he would interest his cabinet colleagues in the question of re-establishing the sugar beet industry in southwestern Ontario, so that if the price of sugar remained at the present level, at least some of these funds could be left in