

desk to that of the Prime Minister. I feel this indicates how he would like to divest himself of any responsibility for fiscal policy.

In dealing with the task force, which is what I believe the Minister of Finance referred to when he talked about meeting with institutions, he stated in the past that he established a task force which included representatives of trust companies, credit unions and the banks to study these problems. When can we expect a report from the task force? Will a report be publicly presented to us? Is the task force working directly with the banks to devise more plans to aid people hurt by high interest rates?

**Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance):** Madam Speaker, the setting up of the task force came out of the meeting I had with financial institutions. It has met a number of times. One of the tasks or one of the primary areas of discussion was how general could an interest deferral scheme become applicable, could it be applied across all financial institutions? Here we have the Royal Bank moving ahead. I know the caisses populaires have already done very commendable work in adjusting their collection schedules to the requirements of the clients.

**Miss MacDonald:** What is the government doing?

**Mr. MacEachen:** I believe in the sound operation of the private economy, the private sector in Canada, and I believe we ought to combine our efforts to solve the problems facing Canadian citizens. It would be possible at the proper stage to combine our efforts and relate what we may do to what has already been accomplished by the private sector. I believe further steps could be taken. I would be pleased to report at the appropriate time to the hon. member and to the House on the results of the monitoring of the task force which has been established.

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### VIA RAIL

#### ELIMINATION OF ATLANTIC LIMITED TRAIN SERVICE

**Hon. J. Robert Howie (York-Sunbury):** Madam Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of the Environment I should like to direct my question to the Minister of Transport. In view of the impressive and extensive criticism of the decision to abandon rail passenger service, will the minister change his decision regarding Atlantic Limited or any of the trains, if facts raising a reasonable doubt about the correctness of his decision are presented to him?

**Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport):** Madam Speaker, I have already expressed myself quite clearly on the subject. I am quite willing to account for the validity of what we have done. But the decision has been made, the cabinet has passed an order in council to that effect, and there is no way that I can come back on that.

### Oral Questions

#### REQUEST THAT MINISTER MEET NEW BRUNSWICK REPRESENTATIVES

**Hon. J. Robert Howie (York-Sunbury):** Madam Speaker, the minister's answer speaks for itself in terms of fairness and regard for Parliament. Where the minister is not prepared to follow the democratic process through the CTC, will he agree to see, at once, representatives of the municipalities in New Brunswick that are directly affected by this cutback and believe they have solid evidence which justifies continuation of the train?

**Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport):** Madam Speaker, I just want to repeat what I have already said and what everyone knows. The law, section 64 of the National Transportation Act of 1967, allows the Government of Canada to do what has been done. There is a reason for that. It is simply that going to the CTC on such a number of routes would give piecemeal decisions on a single file, if one wants to put it that way. What is needed now—and my predecessors received the same recommendation from their advisers, VIA in particular—is a global approach to the rationalization of passenger railway transportation in Canada. The democratic process is being followed. The law allows the government to do that, and there is good reason for it.

#### REQUEST FOR DELAY IN SCRAPPING PASSENGER CARS

**Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West):** Madam Speaker, I have a couple of questions for the Minister of Transport who, like the minister responsible for housing, has been helping to stack the deck chairs on the *Titanic*. Legal action is being initiated today or tomorrow in the courts in Winnipeg, by the city of Melville, the town of Watrous, Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Environmental Association, and the Saskatchewan section of Transport 2000, on the legality of the government's abandonment of certain train services, and since VIA Rail has announced the scrapping of 250 to 300 railway passenger cars, it would be physically impossible to restore those abandoned routes, should the minister's order be found illegal, because of the equipment which has been scrapped.

● (1440)

Pending a decision by the courts or, better, a decision by the House of Commons Transport Committee or the CTC, I should like to ask the minister if he will cancel or delay plans to scrap VIA equipment and cancel or delay the abandonment of certain passenger routes?

**Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport):** Madam Speaker, I think the legal aspect of this is quite clear. Should someone take legal action against a decision of the government, should there be an injunction to stop what is taking place now, I am quite sure the government will obey the law.