

URBAN AFFAIRS

LEAVE OF ABSENCE OF WM. TERON

Mr. Dean Whiteway (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of State for Urban Affairs: it concerns the extended leave of absence given to Mr. Bill Teron, the deputy head of his department. Can the minister indicate to the House when we can expect the return of Mr. Teron? Also, can he explain the conditions under which this unusual extension of leave of absence was granted by the government?

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of State for Urban Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I should like to report that, in fact, Mr. Teron is back at work. I had a meeting with him this morning.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC EXPANSION

INQUIRY WHETHER GOVERNMENT WILL FINANCIALLY ASSIST ESTABLISHMENT OF ZINC PLANT IN NEW BRUNSWICK

Mr. Herb Breau (Gloucester): Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct a question to the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion. First of all, I would like to know what progress has been made in the study conducted by his department concerning a second zinc smelter in northeast New Brunswick; second, has Noranda Mines Limited announced a decision in this matter; and finally, can he ensure the House of his department's full co-operation and of the federal government's financial support in this project should the company give the go ahead and, of course, ask the government for help?

Hon. Marcel Lessard (Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Mr. Speaker, I first want to reassure the hon. member as to my department's continuing interest in this project. As he is aware, we had started negotiating with Noranda Mines and New Brunswick Mining and Smelting about two years ago. However, market conditions have deteriorated since then with the result that the company is far from a final decision. Nevertheless, in the meantime we have agreed to look into the possibility of conducting a feasibility study of the whole project. In the last few months we have received a proposal from a firm in that regard. Both levels of government are now considering this proposal and trying to establish what part of the cost they should bear, as this study would involve substantial sums of money. I can therefore confirm to the hon. member our continuing keen interest in this project, and our hope that international conditions will improve in the next few months so that we may go ahead, if the company so agrees as that time.

Oral Questions

[English]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

REQUEST FOR INVESTIGATION INTO FRAUDULENT CLAIMS

Mr. Tom Cossitt (Leeds): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration: it arises out of information which I received from a high Unemployment Insurance Commission official, indicating that over 40,000 UIC cheques remained unclaimed at temporary distribution centres in Ontario alone at the end of the postal strike.

Will the minister confirm that high-level consideration has been, and is, taking place in Toronto under the chairmanship of Mr. David Brown to determine whether to investigate many such claims that appear fraudulent? Will he confirm that he will order such an investigation and prosecution in all fraudulent cases?

Hon. Bud Cullen (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I am a little surprised that the hon. member would jump to the conclusion that the large majority of working persons in Canada would not pick up their cheques for some fraudulent purpose.

An hon. Member: Who said they were working? They were on UIC.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: If they are working, that is the best fraud.

Mr. Cullen: The fact of the matter is that we were able to advertise that there would be some pick-up points. I would expect that a lot of these people did not pick up their cheques because they did not see the ad. In many cases they were back at work and could not leave the employment they had recently secured. So I think we should await the outcome of the examination to see whether there was fraud, as the hon. member said. If there was, I suggest it would be in a very small minority of cases.

Mr. Cossitt: Mr. Speaker, I am glad, at least, that the minister admits an investigation is going on. Also, I am aware that there are almost 2,000 cheques in the Ottawa area alone. Will the minister advise the House of the total number of unclaimed cheques across the country, including Ontario? I mentioned just Ontario in my previous question. Are investigations taking place regarding all provinces? Will all fraudulent claims be prosecuted? If he can, I think the minister should acknowledge to the House that someone out of work who needs a UIC cheque will not leave it unclaimed, if it is on the level?

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I would think, first and foremost, my officials have a responsibility to see that people who did not receive their cheques will now receive them. They will endeavour to find out where they are and why the cheques have not been picked up. They would be remiss in their duty if they did not check out the reasons for it. But I think they will find, in the vast majority of cases, that it was because people were either at work or were not aware of the fact that it was possible to pick up the cheques at the outlets.