

needs to call upon the Leader of the New Democratic Party here in the federal Parliament for assistance.

My answer to the hon. gentleman is that we are only going to interfere in matters which are within our jurisdiction. We have a Charter of Rights. Any citizen of British Columbia who believes what the hon. gentleman believes, can take action in the courts, and the Charter of Rights in the courts will be there to protect him if the Charter has been violated. Go to the courts where you should be going, not grandstanding in the House of Commons which has no jurisdiction.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC EXPANSION

STEEL INDUSTRY IN QUEBEC

Mr. Jacques Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion.

The Minister is no doubt aware that Stelco, the biggest steel company in Canada with headquarters in Toronto, is about to close three of its plants in Quebec, which means permanent lay-offs for about 550 employees. In view of this threat, I want to ask the Minister what kind of assistance his department would be able to provide immediately to Stelco, first to prevent a situation where hundreds of families would be without an income, and especially to ensure the viability and growth of the steel industry in Quebec.

[English]

Hon. Sinclair Stevens (Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion): Mr. Speaker, we, of course, noted the news account on which the Hon. Member is presumably basing his question. We got in touch with the Stelco executives and they have indicated that to date no firm decision has been made. They want to have certain discussions, and until they have their position clearly identified I think it is very difficult for the Government to respond to the Hon. Member's question.

● (1430)

[Translation]

FUTURE OF EMPLOYEES

Mr. Jacques Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Mr. Speaker, that is not the information we have on this side of the House. In fact, we believe the company will be announcing the shut-downs very shortly, and I hardly think the Minister's remarks are going to reassure my constituents.

I will try again with the Minister of Labour, and ask him, assuming the worst scenario, if he would be willing to provide

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employees who would be laid off with pre-retirement benefits, under the appropriate legislation. Actually, I am asking him to let us know whether he would be willing to designate the steel sector in the Quebec region, so that these workers, if they are laid off, could benefit from pre-retirement provisions.

[English]

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member's entire question is hypothetical and it would be unreasonable to expect anyone to answer a hypothetical question at this time in the House.

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CHARTER OF RIGHTS

PAYMENT OF LITIGATION COSTS

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Justice. Last week he suggested it would be the height of idiocy for the Department of Justice to pay its own legal costs for the very important court action by Operation Dismantle, which action established the fundamental principle that Cabinet decisions are subject to the Charter of Rights. Having consulted with the Prime Minister, will the Minister reconsider his initial response and agree at least to absorb the Government's legal costs, and not effectively cripple Operation Dismantle in its very important work for peace and disarmament?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, Operation Dismantle took action against the Government to stop the testing of the unarmed Cruise missile in Canada. That is the reason they took the action, not to establish some principle as to whether the Cabinet of Canada was subject to the Charter of Rights or otherwise. Let's get that clear.

There are two situations here. One is that the Supreme Court of Canada has ordered that Operation Dismantle should pay the court costs of the Government. That question is under consideration. The court costs could possibly amount to something like \$15,000 if they were taxed. The question the hon. gentleman referred to was whether we would pay the legal costs of Operation Dismantle for this action, and my answer is no, we are not going to pay the legal costs of Operation Dismantle or any other group which takes action against the Government on such frivolous grounds as this. The Supreme Court of Canada found the claim to be thin and frivolous, that there was no claim disclosed by the Statement of Claim, and we are certainly not going to pay the costs of that.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, the Minister has a strange definition of frivolity when the Supreme Court of Canada said there was a fundamental principle at stake here.