

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of any definite plan drawn up by the British Columbia Premier. However, he cannot, without the authorization of the federal government, build a railroad in the Yukon. We are always striving to be on good terms with the government of British Columbia. In that field, as well as in others, I believe that my colleague the Minister of Transport may have had discussions with the government of that province. For my part, I have not had any.

[English]

Mr. Winch: May I ask the Minister of Transport whether he has been approached on the matter of the extension of the Pacific Great Eastern Railway to the Yukon and Northwest Territories and, if not, has the federal government any plans for another railroad development in the north?

Hon. Donald C. Jamieson (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, a report by a firm known as Hedlin-Menzies which was prepared primarily for the federal government, the Department of Transport, but it also had information of value to British Columbia. It was delivered to British Columbia some time ago and subsequently I met with the premier. A federal-provincial committee has been organized representing both levels of government to discuss the whole question of a rail extension through northern British Columbia and, hopefully, into the Yukon.

• (11:40 a.m.)

Mr. Frank Howard (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Minister of Transport. As the matter of rail extension in northern British Columbia by Canadian National Railways has been dragging on for years and years, can he give any indication of when this federal-provincial committee may conclude its discussions and make an announcement, particularly about action by the CNR?

Mr. Jamieson: Mr. Speaker, I would hope it would not be too long. It is a very complicated and technical document involving, I think, five or six potential routes and there has to be a great deal of on the ground study of these routes. But both the government of British Columbia and the federal government are anxious to get the study completed as soon as possible. If the hon. member does not pin me to this specifically, I would hope that within the current year we could reach some resolution of the question.

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HARBOURS

PRINCE RUPERT—REQUEST FOR REPORT ON DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Frank Howard (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, I wish to ask a related question. When is the minister going to make an announcement concerning what his department is going to do about harbour development at Prince Rupert?

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Inquiries of the Ministry

Hon. Donald C. Jamieson (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I do not believe I am disclosing any confidence in any improper way when I say that I have indicated again to the government of British Columbia the willingness of the government of Canada to declare Prince Rupert a national harbour. Negotiations to that end are now under way. Hopefully, this will be one of the matters that I will discuss when I visit British Columbia this weekend.

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CROWN CORPORATIONS

POLYMER—GOVERNMENT APPROVAL OF DECISION TO LAY OFF EMPLOYEES—GENERAL POLICY

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a question to the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. In light of the government's apparent commitment to avert further lay-offs in Canadian manufacturing, was the decision of Polymer, announced on September 3, to lay off 72 employees in Sarnia on October 4 taken in consultation with the government and with the approval of the government? If not, is action being taken to ensure that Polymer Corporation conforms with government policy on these matters?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, the difficulties that Polymer is experiencing now have been documented in the press. It has lost a very important contract to Japanese competition, and I presume that the lay-off of the 72 people referred to by the hon. member is partly due to that.

Mr. Dinsdale: Has the government established a policy with regard to employees and lay-off practices in all Crown corporations and agencies and, if so, when will the minister be making a public announcement to that effect?

Mr. Pepin: Mr. Speaker, I will make the Minister of Labour, who is responsible for these matters, aware of the question.

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TRANSPORT

EXTENSION OF REDUCED RAILWAY FARES TO BLIND AND DISABLED

Mr. W. B. Nesbitt (Oxford): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a question to the Minister of Transport. In view of the recent announcement that senior citizens are to receive the benefit of reduced fares on the railways, an action with which I think all members of the House would agree, would the minister use his good offices to see that the same fare advantages are also extended to the blind and the disabled?

Hon. Donald C. Jamieson (Minister of Transport): That is certainly a most commendable suggestion, Mr. Speaker. I will be glad to convey it to the railways.