

Inquiries of the Ministry

[Translation]

AIR CANADA**WINNIPEG—REQUEST FOR STATEMENT
RESPECTING OVERHAUL BASE**

On the orders of the day:

Mr. Bernard Dumont (Frontenac): Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct a question to the hon. Minister of Transport. It is an urgent question, Mr. Speaker, because it could prevent an unnecessary expenditure of about \$10 million.

Can the minister assure this house that the government will take note of the reports of experts and fully respect the collective agreements concerning the gradual closing down, between now and 1973, of the Air Canada maintenance base at Winnipeg?

Mr. Speaker: It seems to me that the hon. member cannot ask the hon. minister to make a rather general statement about his views and intentions. I do not think the question can be put in those terms. The hon. member might perhaps try to word it differently.

Mr. Dumont: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will therefore ask the hon. minister to tell us if his department has refused to attend a meeting of the members of the Q.F.L. and to participate in the discussion I mentioned earlier?

[English]

Hon. Paul Hellyer (Minister of Transport): I do not think we have refused to meet with anyone on the subject. I am speaking from memory; I am not sure, because not all these requests come to my attention. This is a current problem of considerable importance. The previous prime minister made a commitment to the people of Winnipeg that the base there would continue in operation until the end of 1972 or that an equivalent solution would be found which would employ approximately the same work force and approximately the same skills presently being used in Winnipeg. A study is currently being undertaken to see whether some satisfactory solution can be reached.

With respect to reports of experts, there is the usual problem of getting information in the form which is intelligible to the layman—

An hon. Member: And to you.

Mr. Hellyer: I was including myself in that class—and in a form which would provide a basis of judgment satisfactory to the people involved.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether I might direct it to the Minister without Portfolio, the hon. member for Winnipeg South. In view of charges that the minister and others are making efforts to maintain the overhaul and maintenance base at Winnipeg, can the hon. gentleman say what progress he is making toward this end?

Mr. Speaker: I am not sure the question is properly directed to the Minister without Portfolio. I have some doubts about this.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Then may I direct the question to his superior, the Minister of Transport, and ask whether he can reply to these charges.

Mr. Hellyer: I think the Minister without Portfolio could answer the question much more effectively than I can. But since I have been called upon to reply, I can say that the Minister without Portfolio as well as all the other members from the Winnipeg area are taking a very real interest in this question.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): How are we doing?

Mr. Diefenbaker: Is the minister taking an unreal interest?

Mr. Hellyer: All I can say, Mr. Speaker, is that they are still in the game, but it is a very complicated and difficult question, as my hon. friend will appreciate. It is one of the problems receiving most active attention at the present time because we do want to get some acceptable solution and discuss it with the workmen directly involved, and hopefully to gain the maximum co-operation from all the diverse interests represented.

[Translation]

Mr. Georges Valade (Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Minister of Transport.

When does he intend to make a statement in the house so that we may be clearly informed as to the intentions of the government in that respect?

[English]

Mr. Hellyer: Just as soon as a definitive decision has been taken, Mr. Speaker. I think my hon. friend will appreciate, however, that there are certain aspects which are completely within the control of the company and