

Oral Questions

that the negotiations are ongoing, and there is no consideration at this time of appointing a conciliator.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, obviously negotiations will be hard. When I indicated on October 5 that we were resuming negotiations, I said they would be long and difficult, but that I am not losing spirit. I see that necessarily we will have a collective agreement in the near future because this confrontation has to come to an end, since it has disturbed the postal services and basically reduced our volume levels in the past.

[*English*]

Mr. Alexander: As I understand it, the policy of the minister is assured mail delivery. Would the minister advise whether it is the position of the government that the delivery of mail is an essential service?

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. gentleman came to the Finkelman committee on a number of occasions, and he is familiar with the Public Service Staff Relations Act. I ask him to check the definition within that act.

Mr. Alexander: You have evaded my question.

Mr. Speaker: I think the hon. member will realize that the Chair would have some grave reservations as to whether such a general policy statement would be proper in the question period in any case.

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[*Translation*]

INDUSTRY**REQUEST FOR MEETING WITH PROVINCES, COMPANIES AND UNIONS TO AVOID DETERIORATION OF MINING SECTOR**

Mr. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources.

The managing director of Quebec Metal Mining Association Inc., Mr. Langlois, made a statement in Quebec City yesterday to the effect that the mining industry is trapped and helpless without government assistance. A moment ago I moved a motion that my friends opposite rejected. Now, I would like to direct my question to the minister. Could he give the House the assurance that this government is prepared to call a summit meeting inviting of course all his provincial counterparts, industry leaders and union representatives, to set up a long term policy to provide security for these people who, as the minister is certainly aware, are very much concerned about the future of the mining sector throughout Canada?

[*English*]

Hon. Alastair Gillespie (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, I have been giving consideration to a federal-provincial conference of energy ministers. Perhaps such a conference should include the finance ministers of the various provinces. There have been some soundings, but it would be too early at this time for me to say that a conference will take place. There might well be merit in such a conference

[*Mr. Blais.*]

but I would want to make sure that the provincial ministers would support it.

● (1127)

One point that has been made from time to time is that the tax rates across the country vary considerably from province to province. The point has also been made that some provinces have higher tax rates than the federal government whose tax rate is the same all across the country. There might well be an opportunity to meet and discuss an over-all view with respect to the future of the mining industry and the relative positions of the two governments, the contributions that the provinces on the one hand and federal government policies on the other, might be able to make to stabilize this very important industry in the country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. La Salle: I would like to direct a supplementary question to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources.

Mr. Speaker, I find the minister's answer more encouraging than the one he gave us last week. The minister mentioned a possible meeting with his provincial counterparts, but I think he will not underrate the importance of gathering around the same table representatives of companies and unions which are primarily concerned. Since these company leaders might contribute their advice for a future policy, could the minister give us assurance that there will be participation of employer and union representatives so that this policy be made with the cooperation of the interested sectors?

[*English*]

Mr. Gillespie: Mr. Speaker, the whole question of a conference of this kind is, of course, a highly complicated one and requires a good deal of discussion with provincial ministers. It would seem to me that as preparation for such a federal-provincial conference, the provincial ministers should invite management representatives of the industry and representatives of the labour segment of that industry for discussions with respect to their particular provincial points of view. I can assure the hon. member that I would be very pleased to do the same thing, but I think when talking about a federal-provincial conference one would have to limit that to a conference of ministers after ministers had prepared the groundwork through consultation with members of the industry, that is to say labour representatives and management representatives.

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SOCIAL SECURITY**STATEMENT BY MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS CONCERNING CUTS IN PENSIONS AND ALLOWANCES—REQUEST FOR CLARIFICATION**

Mr. Heward Grafftey (Brome-Missisquoi): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Public Works. Before he made his most important speech some weeks ago relating to the possible cutbacks in welfare payments to Canadians, notably family allowances and pensions, had he