

and the federal government co-operating to try to work out a system of equalizing qualifications across the country.

It seems to me that that might be something which could proceed or go on independent of any national forum. The problem has certainly been around for a long time. I ran into it myself 26 years ago when coming from the University of Alberta to Carleton University. I suggest that the problem has, if anything, intensified in the last two or three decades. Such active involvement on the part of the federal government with the provinces might go a long way towards encouraging students across the country whom we are asking to find jobs, but who are impeded by the educational system from getting the proper scholastic training and knowledge.

Senator Murray: I will keep those comments in mind and undertake to bring them to the attention of the Secretary of State.

TRANSPORT

CLOSING OF CN SHOPS, MONCTON

Hon. L. Norbert Thériault: Honourable senators, I want to join with other senators in congratulating the Leader of the Government on his appointment. Due to the apparent weakness of the ministers who represent the Atlantic provinces in this government at the present time, I express my hope and wish that the Leader of the Government in the Senate will not forget those of us who live in the province of New Brunswick.

More specifically, my question relates to the tremendous impact the closing of the CNR shops is having on the city of Moncton and the province as a whole. More specifically, I refer to the negotiations, which were broken off last Friday or Saturday, between CN and its unions regarding the possibility of a contract which would permit CGE to purchase the shops and start an industry. Can the Leader of the Government in the Senate tell us if the government is following these negotiations? Has he anything to tell the people of New Brunswick respecting these various important subjects?

● (1510)

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, it is a fact that a few weeks ago the federal government established a three-year, \$4 million special initiative for that area. However, respecting the negotiations that are now under way, as the honourable senator has noted, three of the seven unions involved have walked away from the negotiations; they have refused to negotiate. I can only express the hope that the matter will be resolved and that an agreement can be reached before the deadline, which I understand is October 15.

Senator Thériault: Honourable senators, although I thank the minister for his answer, he has not said very much. That has been the problem for the past couple of years regarding the closing of those shops.

I do want to stress the importance of that industry to New Brunswick. The closing of the shops in Moncton is possibly the most severe blow to New Brunswick in the past 40 years.

Senator Murray: How many years?

Senator Thériault: Forty years.

Senator Murray: Forty?

Senator Thériault: Yes. The shops in Moncton became an institution of that province. They represented employment not only to people in the city of Moncton but to people in all of the surrounding areas. The degradation of CN in New Brunswick is felt not only in Moncton but all over the place, as I am sure my colleagues from New Brunswick can attest to. It is a severe shock to the people of New Brunswick.

I am sure that the minister is aware of the seriousness of this affair, yet all he can offer by way of a solution is the information that \$4 million will be spent over three years. I think that if the minister cannot mention anything more substantial than \$4 million spread over three years to replace the loss of over 1,200 jobs, then he should not mention anything at all. Perhaps he should say that the government is hoping to do something more worthwhile than spend \$4 million over three years. We in the Atlantic provinces are not that gullible, although the Minister of Transport may think that we are.

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, it is obvious from the tone and content of the question—if it was a question—that the honourable senator wishes to debate the matter, and I invite him to do so at the appropriate time. It is good, however, to be precise about these matters. The figure that I have in front of me indicates that there are at the CN shops some 1,022 jobs. My information is that Canadian General Electric would employ some 300 people, that CN will transfer to the Gordon yards 150 people, that some 130 people will remain in the shops in administration and that some 200 are being transferred to other places. That leaves for possible layoff, but also for possible retraining or early retirement, 237 employees.

Senator Thériault: Honourable senators, the minister has explained those figures. I thought there were 1,200 jobs, because I was thinking in terms of the last two years. Two years ago there were more than 1,200 people working at those shops. If anyone wishes to discuss the subject with them, the employees will say that they are worried to death about the transfer of 150 jobs to the so-called Gordon yards, because they know that in the long run the work will not be available to them. If they stay there, it means that other people will lose their jobs. Without the involvement of CGE approximately 1,000 jobs will be lost to the Moncton area, and with the involvement of CGE that figure will still be over 400. If the minister wants to debate the matter, and if he feels like the Minister of Transport does that this problem is nothing, that is one thing. But my question is: Does he really believe that \$4 million spread over three years will begin to compensate for the loss of all of those jobs?

Senator Murray: I do invite my honourable friend to raise the matter during the debate on the Address in Reply and we shall debate it.