

Inquiries of the Ministry

in the House shortly. Since the receipt of that letter there have been several meetings between myself and my counterpart in Quebec which I think have led to a satisfactory explanation of most of the major issues which the province of Quebec raised in that letter of November 13.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, is the minister telling the House that the government of Quebec is satisfied to have the minister proceed with the white paper and has withdrawn its objections in this regard? Has the minister replied in writing to Mr. Cournoyer and, if so, would he table the correspondence between himself and Mr. Cournoyer in the House?

Mr. Mackasey: Mr. Speaker, I do not say this in a sarcastic vein, but there are a lot of questions in this regard and if I do not answer them all I hope later in the day the hon. gentleman will ask the few questions that I do not answer at this time. I think neither I nor the hon. gentleman would be able to infer from the letter that the province of Quebec does not intend to participate in the proposed changes in the Unemployment Insurance Act. The role of the province of Quebec is that of employer and there are provisions in the white paper which would allow any province that does not wish to participate in the plan to remain outside as an employer.

Many of the objections, not all, that the province of Quebec raised in their analysis of the white paper in their letter of November 14 have, I believe, been met satisfactorily not only as a result of the exchange of correspondence but also as a result of several meetings which I have held with various ministers of the province of Quebec. As to whether or not there is a reply to that letter, I may say there is, but whether or not I intend to table it will depend on my opinion of the circumstances under which that letter appeared in the Montreal *Le Devoir*. I would be very surprised if the letter which appeared in the newspaper appeared with the written or verbal consent of the Minister of Labour of the province of Quebec.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Will the minister seek the approval of Mr. Cournoyer and the government of Quebec of the tabling of any such correspondence, and did he mean to indicate to the House that Mr. Cournoyer and the province of Quebec were dropping their assertion that unemployment insurance and manpower programs ought to be administered by the province of Quebec rather than by the parliament of Canada?

Mr. Mackasey: Mr. Speaker, what I am really trying to say is that when there are differences of opinion between the federal Minister of Labour and his provincial counterpart, a difference of opinion which is real or imaginary, I prefer to settle those differences by direct negotiation rather than by an exchange of correspondence in newspapers.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, I asked the minister a direct question relating to seeking the permission of the Quebec minister and the government of Quebec for the

[Mr. Mackasey.]

tabling of this correspondence in the House. Since the letter from the Quebec minister has been published, will the Minister of Labour seek permission from the government of Quebec or from its appropriate minister to table the correspondence in this House?

Mr. Mackasey: Mr. Speaker, I will certainly discuss with the Minister of Labour of the province of Quebec how this confidential letter appeared in a public newspaper.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker: Order. Does the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe wish to ask a supplementary question?

Hon. Théogène Ricard (Saint-Hyacinthe): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Could the minister tell the House whether it is official that in his letter Mr. Cournoyer tells the federal Minister of Labour that this letter might be published?

Mr. Mackasey: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I believe that in that letter Mr. Cournoyer drew my attention to this possibility, but I am not sure that this was written with his approval.

ALLEGED REFUSAL BY QUEBEC TO CONTRIBUTE TO FUND

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. member for Abitibi want to ask a supplementary question?

Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Labour told us earlier that since receiving this letter from the Quebec Minister of Labour he has had discussions with the latter about the white paper on unemployment insurance. Can he tell us whether the Quebec Minister of Labour has agreed or refused to contribute for workers, Public Service employees and employees of the Quebec government?

[English]

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I think it would be unfair for me to speak on behalf of the province of Quebec, particularly since they have not seen the proposed legislation. I would not want to be in contempt of parliament by showing the proposed legislation to the province before members of the House of Commons have had an opportunity to study the bill after first reading.

IMMEDIATE CHANGES TO ASSIST HARD-CORE UNEMPLOYED

Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Hastings): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question. As it now appears certain that amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act will not become effective for quite some time, and since the hard core of the unemployed—those who have been unemployed for over three months—is double the normal rate for this time last year, would the minister give consideration to introducing some interim measure now so that the families of these hard-core unemployed do not suffer unduly during the winter months?