

Mr. Lewis: I understand the minister is refusing to make a general statement.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lewis: In view of the fact that as soon as the Mercantile Bank reaches the 25 per cent target in foreign ownership it will be able to increase its business without statutory limitation and in view of the fact that 25 per cent ownership would place complete control in the hands of a giant foreign bank, would the minister consider making a statement to the House to explain why it is necessary to expand foreign ownership in so critical an area in Canada as banking?

Mr. Benson: What is really happening is that the last bank in Canada which is owned by foreigners is going to be 75 per cent Canadian-owned ten years from now.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont): In light of the generous and extraordinary provisions accorded to the Mercantile Bank, can the minister indicate what particular benefits are being offered by the bank to Canadians in return?

Mr. Benson: There are no generous benefits at all. Any bank can ask for authorization of an increase in capital. As a matter of fact, no bank has ever been refused such an application by a minister of finance. What is happening here is that rather than merely approve an increase in capital we have asked for a guarantee from the Mercantile Bank that they will move toward 75 per cent Canadian ownership within ten years before they can get it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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[Translation]

POST OFFICE

STATUS OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH FORMER EMPLOYEES OF G. LAPALME INCORPORATED

Mr. Henry Latulippe (Compton): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to ask a question from the hon. Minister of Labour but since he is not here, I shall ask it from the Minister without Portfolio responsible for the Post Office Department.

The former employees of G. Lapalme Inc. are still marching in front of the Parliament Buildings today and this has now been going on for several weeks. Would the hon. minister tell the House and the population of Canada how long this is expected to last? Why not come to a satisfactory settlement with this group of taxpayers who are pleading democratically and peacefully for the government's consideration?

Is it necessary—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member but my impression is that this question was asked yesterday, that it was reiterated a short while ago by the hon. member for Huron (Mr. McKinley), and that, moreover, it has been answered by the minister.

Inquiries of the Ministry

[English]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

REUNITING OF SPOUSES AND IMMEDIATE FAMILIES

Mr. Stanley Haidasz (Parkdale): I should like to ask the Acting Prime Minister whether the government has taken any new action following recent representations about the urgent need to reunify spouses and immediate families? I should also like to ask whether the Secretary of State for External Affairs has replied to requests arising from the recent events in Poland?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): The government has been actively engaged in trying to reunite Canadians with their families from eastern Europe. We have never given up in our efforts. We continue on almost a daily and weekly basis. We are now looking at the situation in Poland to see whether there is anything useful we can do.

ALLEGED BLACKMAILING TACTICS AGAINST FORMER CZECHOSLOVAKS NOW RESIDING IN CANADA

Mr. Robert C. Coates (Cumberland-Colchester North): I should like to ask the Secretary of State for External Affairs whether the blackmailing tactics used on Czechoslovaks who came to this country after the insurrection there have come to his attention and whether his department is taking any action to assist these people in the face of these blackmailing tactics by the government of that country?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs): I take it the hon. member is referring to some recent letters which have come from Czechoslovakia. Tonight in Toronto a meeting is being held at which a number of government officials will be meeting with members of the Czechoslovak-Canadian community to discuss the best way of dealing with this situation. I can assure the hon. member we have this very actively in hand.

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LABOUR RELATIONS

SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTE BETWEEN SEAFARERS' INTERNATIONAL UNION AND CANADIAN LAKE CARRIERS ASSOCIATION

Mr. S. J. Korchinski (Mackenzie): I have a question for the Minister of Labour or, in his absence, for his Parliamentary Secretary. Can the hon. gentleman inform the House and the country as to the state of the negotiations between the various unions and the Lakehead Terminal Elevators Association.

Mr. Ray Perrault (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Labour): If the hon. member is referring to the Canadian Lake Carriers Association and the dispute with the Seafarers' International Union, I have some information on that subject. G. R. Doucet, the conciliation officer in this dispute, has just wired to say that an agreement was reached between the parties at 5.30 a.m. this morning. Details of the settlement are to follow.

Some hon. Members: Hear, Hear!