

Oral Questions

like to return to work there, are among the finest tradesmen in the world as well.

These men, and I, would like to know why the federal Government can spend \$350 million to purchase British Petroleum, a move which will not create a single job; bail out Dome Petroleum to the tune of millions of dollars, a company that purchases its ships from Japan; order a \$150 million semi-submersible rig from Korea; then allow its champion of Canadianization, Petro-Canada, to pull out of a multi-million dollar deal with the Saint John Shipbuilding Company which has resulted in the loss of some 2,000 man-years. This was done despite the fact that the private company which the Government was operating in conjunction with wanted to go ahead with the deal. Will the Minister tell the House why this was done? What does he intend to do to protect the jobs in Saint John and to get these laid-off workers back to work?

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Madam Speaker, I think the question is a rather long one. The Hon. Member referred to the purchase of BP. I should like to say to him that it is a commercial transaction. It does not involve any funds from the Government and, in fact, it is a profit-making decision by Petro-Canada.

As far as the problems of shipbuilding in Canada and the competitive position of any company that wants to have facilities made in Canada are concerned, of course it is a question of competition with other available facilities either in Canada or sometimes elsewhere. I am not aware of the specific problem which the Hon. Member mentioned, but I can tell him that a lot of work has been done in Saint John at the initiative of the Government. We are quite proud of our record in terms of the work which we have been able to provide to Saint John over the years.

Madam Speaker: I ask Hon. Members to return to asking short questions. I am becoming increasingly disappointed. When we returned to the Chamber, all Hon. Members were very good at asking short questions and giving short answers. I was sitting here feeling very generous that I could recognize so many Members. Please return to that very good discipline; it is marvellous for the House.

Mr. Corbett: Madam Speaker, as far as the laid-off workers of Saint John are concerned, the Minister might as well continue his seance of meditation.

POLICY REVIEW

Mr. Bob Corbett (Fundy-Royal): Madam Speaker, I will direct my supplementary question to the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. For several years the federal Government has been boasting a shipbuilding policy review. The review has been completed, passed by Cabinet, and yet the Government continues to sit on policies which should protect not only the Canadian shipbuilding industry but workers' jobs.

Some Hon. Members: Order, order!

Mr. Corbett: Does the Minister have any intention of releasing this review and, if so, would he please give the House and the laid-off workers of the nation, those Canadians whose livelihoods depend on this industry, a firm date and a commitment?

Hon. Ed Lumley (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce and Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member seems to be very well informed about what goes on in Cabinet. However, I should like to inform him, as a Member from New Brunswick in his Party caucus, that my colleague from Saint John has already made substantial representations for the shipbuilding industry in Saint John. The Export Development Corporation, for example, was very instrumental in obtaining a \$100 million contract for semi-submersible rigs in Saint John, one of the first ones ever built in Canada, so the Government has already taken positive action.

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CANADIAN TRANSPORT COMMISSION

WESTERN BRANCH LINE ABANDONMENT HEARINGS

Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Prince Albert): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport. As the Minister knows, the Canadian Transport Commission continues to hold abandonment hearings on hundreds of miles of railway branch lines in western Canada. Decisions on abandonment centre on whether railways will receive sufficient revenues to maintain the branch lines. That is the principal test of whether the lines and the communities on them will live or die. Can the Minister tell the House why abandonment hearings and decisions are continuing, given the Government's intent to change the Crow rate and the fact that it has no idea how much railways will receive through the operation of branch lines?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, indeed I have deeply meditated, as the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources would say, on that particular subject. I decided not to instruct the CTC to abandon the procedure for the abandonment of branch lines for essentially three reasons. The first one was that the concept of viability, to which my friend made reference, would apply here in a very special way. When the Hon. Member talked about branch lines being viable, he means viable after a branch line subsidy of \$250 million a year, after a branch line rehabilitation program of \$700 million over a period of ten years, and so on and so forth. I thought that was not a particularly defensible concept of profitability.

Second, there were a number of branch lines which remained to be assessed by the CTC. Most of them, if not all, have already been rejected by Hall and by PRAC; some have already been ruled out by the CTC.

Third, rates are not the only factor in branch line abandonment. Volume and the situation of the rail, for example, have