

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

[English]

An hon. Member: You go with Grégoire.

[Translation]

Hon. P.-E. Trudeau (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, if the reply is reduced to its barest essentials, it is sufficient to say that the agenda of this conference was suggested by the federal government and that a constitutional bill of rights will be discussed. However, the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) also indicated that he was open to any suggestion from the provinces in respect of this agenda. The Prime Minister has stated to the house that the replies had not all been received, but that he would try to get leave from the provinces, as soon as possible, to table their replies in the house. Eventually, we shall be able to draw up an agenda, when all the replies will have been received.

● (10:40 p.m.)

[English]

TRANSPORT—BORDEN-TORMENTINE FERRY—
REPORTED DRASTIC LAY-OFFS

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Queens): Mr. Speaker, my question today arose after my visit to Prince Edward Island this past week end. I am sure that had the hon. member for Prince (Mr. MacDonald) been able to be here for question period he would have raised it. My colleagues from the province and I have discussed it today. Whether the Prince Edward Island federation of labour or any of its members have formally protested to the minister, I do not know. I do know however that there is widespread anxiety over the matter in Prince Edward Island, and that Prince Edward Island labour was represented at the recent meetings held in Moncton.

We have few enough sources of employment in our province and our region, Mr. Speaker; we can ill afford further diminution of these opportunities. Unemployment in the Atlantic region is chronically too high. Since 1963 decisions of this government have contributed to loss of jobs for Island people.

For example, there was first of all the closing of the repair and maintenance depot at Charlottetown airport in 1963, early, I believe, in those "60 days of decision". The Queen Charlotte naval base has been closed. Other factors contributing to the situation are these. The new car ferry promised in 1967, called after a father of confederation, will not be completed in centennial year; I am advised that it is already a year late. The causeway, tenders for which were called in 1965, was with maximum progress to have been finished in 1970. The Prime Minister's

[Mr. Speaker.]

press release in July 1965 indicated that \$30 million a year would be spent on this great and useful project. How far we are off the target date, both in work accomplished and in funds expended, is now a matter of record.

What calls me here tonight, Mr. Speaker, is that the possibilities for new employment opportunities which have been missed in this connection are immense. The ferry is late, the causeway is late and the trains are getting later still. The train from Moncton now arrives in Charlottetown, when it is on schedule, at 12.45 midnight, six hours after leaving Moncton. It used to arrive at 9 p.m. It is therefore not surprising that this train is not overwhelmingly popular with the travelling public in this, the jet age. Unless the trains have better and more comfortable facilities, and swifter schedules, it is unlikely that they will be favourites of the travelling public.

I am confident, Mr. Speaker, that part of the Canadian National Railways troubles in Atlantic Canada is its failure to update its equipment and its services to the public. In this particular instance the C.N.R. must be strongly criticized for its handling of the situation, for its abrupt dismissal of hundreds of employees, many with long years of faithful service. Men whose whole life was railroading now find themselves in the ranks of the unemployed and faced with a workless winter of discontent. I have been advised that about 40 men from Prince Edward Island were among those to be separated from their employment. I have recently been told that this is a conservative estimate.

It is said that unusually heavy cuts are being made in the Prince Edward Island-New Brunswick ferry service. Men of experience in these matters feel that there are not enough deckhands being retained to man the lifeboats, should an emergency arise. This is a very serious matter and I hope that corrective measures will be taken if this is the case. I know of no technological advances which suggest that a cut in the crew of these ferries is propitious. If x men were needed to man these ships last year, they cannot properly be manned, it seems to me, with a smaller crew this year.

Generally speaking, Mr. Speaker, our unemployment figures are disturbing. Just because Atlantic Canada has long been at the top of the list in unemployment figures and at the bottom of the list in statistics relating to income is no reason to make us special targets for this present phase of job losses. That a crown corporation in an area of