

Oral Questions

REQUEST FOR PROTECTION OF SUBDIVISIONS

Mr. Laverne Lewycky (Dauphin-Swan River): Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Minister of Transport. Could he assure us that constituents and others appearing before the hearings of the CTC, who have complained that the CTC is like a three-ring circus coming into town, that it sets up a hoop and everyone has to run through it, will not have to go through this experience? Could he give me some assurance that subdivisions such as Erwood, Oakland, Rosburn, Ste. Rose, and Winnipegosis, Manitoba, which are in the process of being abandoned, will be protected? Could the Minister give us some assurance on that matter?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): No, Madam Speaker, because if I were to do that I would pre-judge the decision of the CTC, and obviously that is not the right thing to do.

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LABOUR CONDITIONS

STUDENT EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM—DEPARTMENTAL CRITERIA

Mrs. Jennifer Cossitt (Leeds-Grenville): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration and pertains to the unemployed youth in my constituency. In past years it has been customary to hire local students for any summer positions available through the Department of Immigration, but this year the local students have been denied that opportunity because of the new selective hiring criteria imposed on summer jobs through the new career oriented Student Employment Program. These jobs formerly went to residents of the area who were qualified, but now they are being awarded to students from as far away as Toronto because local students do not meet the requirement that they be enrolled in a law or security program course.

Will the Minister explain what are all the reasons why these criteria were changed? What is the justification for the change which resulted in local students being denied the opportunity of summer employment by the Department of a Minister who tells us that he is concerned about our unemployed youth?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, I do not know the specific case. I would be pleased to receive it from the Hon. Member. However, I would point out that under the Student Employment Program this year about one-third of the positions are intern programs where we have made arrangements with various organizations to take students on a career training program so that, not only will they work during the summer but they will work in jobs related to their educational background. That may provide a partial explanation, but I would ask the Hon. Member to give me a specific case so that I can look into it and get back to her with an answer.

REQUEST THAT MINISTER TAKE ACTION

Mrs. Jennifer Cossitt (Leeds-Grenville): Madam Speaker, I appreciate that response, but local employment offices were not made aware that changes were being made in this respect. What was happening was that local referees were sent to the Department of Immigration and were told that their applications would not be accepted, that they had to come through COSEP from Toronto. Will the Minister take some sort of corrective action in this regard?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, I can only repeat that whatever action is taken must be based upon the facts of the case. As soon as I receive those facts fully, I will look into them and report back.

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RAILWAYS

BRANCHLINE REHABILITATION—AWARDING OF CONTRACTS

Mr. Doug Neil (Moose Jaw): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport. It concerns the awarding of contracts for the rehabilitation of prairie branchlines. In view of the fact that the money being spent on the rehabilitation is taxpayers' money, could the Minister tell the House whether or not the Government, or his Department, has any input to or control over the awarding of the contracts?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, I could not say that. I know only that the decisions on branchline rehabilitation—which one will be rehabilitated this year as opposed to the one that will be rehabilitated next year or later on—are jointly made by the railways, my Department, and others. I would have thought that the contracts would be given by the railways. I am not sure, but I will find out.

I know something else, that there are limitations to the freedom of the railways because they have agreements with employees that they have first choice for employment in certain types of work. That is a limitation to the contracting out approach to these works.

REQUEST THAT MINISTER EXAMINE CONTRACT SYSTEM IN SASKATCHEWAN

Mr. Doug Neil (Moose Jaw): Madam Speaker, I was not concerned about the rights of employees. I was concerned about the awarding of contracts to outside contractors. It seems to me that if taxpayers' money is being spent the Department should have some control. It has been brought to my attention, particularly in Saskatchewan, that in most instances the contract is awarded to the highest tender. If this is what happens, there is something wrong with the system. I would ask the Minister to look into it.

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): I will look into it, Madam Speaker, and report back.