

Oral Questions

[Translation]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

SUGGESTION COMMISSION MAKE DECISIONS MORE QUICKLY

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, I should like to put my question to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration.

Further to the motion presented by my colleague from Bellechasse concerning the conflict in the building industry in Quebec last summer, which conflict has now been settled, surely the minister knows that a large number of workers who have asked for unemployment benefits have all been given the same answer: Your case is under review. In the meantime, those people are not even entitled to welfare since civil servants refuse to reach a decision. Can the minister tell us whether his department has taken a stand with regard to those thousands of Quebecers and, if not, can he instruct his civil servants to reach a decision as soon as possible so if their decision does not satisfy the unemployed they can appeal the decision?

Hon. Jack Cullen (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I shall have to look into the situation described by the hon. leader of the Social Credit Party of Canada, after which I shall give him a report.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Lotbinière.

Mr. Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I can understand that, like the other ministers, this one has to do a lot of "looking into", but the people concerned have been waiting for financial assistance since August because they are entitled neither to unemployment insurance nor welfare. Can the minister tell us how long this study will take since all the facts are known, so that those Quebecers can be helped out?

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● (1420)

[English]

ROYAL COMMISSIONSFINANCIAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ACCOUNTABILITY—
BACKGROUND OF MR. CARON—SUGGESTED INQUIRY INTO
POSSIBLE CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Mr. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the President of the Treasury Board. It has to do with the establishment of the Royal Commission on Financial Organization and Accountability. In light of the widespread consensus that the royal commission is completely unnecessary and constitutes a stalling tactic on the part of the government, and in light of the need to ensure that whatever the commission does represents an honest and impartial examination of the facts, if any public interest is to be served, was the President of the Treasury Board aware at the time of the announcement that one of the members of the commission, Mr. H. Marcel Caron is a former director of Atomic Energy of Canada Limited, who must share responsibility for the substantial payments out of public funds about

[Mr. Munro (Hamilton East).]

which the Auditor General expressed grave concern in his latest report?

Hon. Robert K. Andras (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, without in any way accepting the preamble to the question with regard to the reason for the royal commission, I must inform the hon. member that I became aware only last night that the member of the commission to whom he is referring had in fact been a director of AECL.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): You have to be kidding.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: The Auditor General was really right.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Who appointed him?

Mr. Andras: I must say that his appointment was discussed in very informed circles. He is recognized as being a very distinguished and capable member of the accounting profession in Quebec. His financial expertise and accounting expertise are recognized as being needed and desirable on the commission, and indeed, he resigned from AECL of his own volition and for his own reasons earlier.

Mr. Mazankowski: In view of the fact that the minister became aware of this only last night, can he tell the House whether he will apprise himself of the nature and extent of Mr. Caron's knowledge of the transactions which were made and which were clearly questionable in the eyes of the Auditor General at that time? Will the minister undertake to look into this whole question to ensure that the question of impropriety does not rest in any way, shape or form with Mr. Caron, and will he report back to the House?

Mr. Andras: Without implying any agreement about Mr. Caron, I have already given such consideration because I think it is necessary to clear up the issue quickly.

Mr. Mazankowski: Since there could be a conflict of interest in this particular area—

Mr. Fairweather: There is a conflict of interest.

Mr. Mazankowski:—and given the fact that on the surface at least there seem to be some built in biases on the part of other commissioners, and in the hope that this commission will be as impartial as the public demands, will the minister give this House an undertaking that he will examine and review the credentials of all the members of this commission before proceeding further?

Mr. Andras: That has been done by many people with regard to this particular issue. I have already indicated I was not aware of that complication until last night, so the answer is yes.