

BLOCKADE:

Canada's Transport Minister ignores question about compensation

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND: — Canada's Transport Minister Marc Garneau totally ignored the essence of a question asked by Kristina Michaud, Member of Parliament for the riding of Avignon-Mitis-Matane-Matapédia, who wanted to know if the federal government is thinking of providing compensation to the Gaspésie Railway Society to make up for the losses sustained during the 25-day blockade in Listuguj.

The question was asked on March 9 at the House of Commons, four days after the barricade was lifted. The translation of the question and answer was forwarded by the House of Commons. The question was asked in French.

"Mr. Speaker, the rail crisis has had a huge impact on the economy in Eastern Quebec. The Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie is still taking stock, but we already know that losses exceed half a million dollars. The Bay of Chaleurs Chamber of Commerce has sounded the alarm and is worried that it will take months for the economy to recover. The Chamber asked the federal government for assistance last Thursday. The lack of federal leadership is what caused the rail crisis to drag on. Will the government compensate companies for their losses?" asked Ms. Michaud, who represents the Bloc Québécois.

In his answer, Liberal Party Minister Garneau never mentioned the matter of compensation.

"Mr. Speaker, in this government, we believe it is important to follow a process for reconciliation. That is what we have done. The rail blockades were unfortunate, but we worked very hard, around the clock, to resolve the crisis. I am pleased to see that trains are moving again on rail lines across the country," he replied.

The director general of the Gaspésie Railway Society, Luc Lévesque, said minutes after the blockade was lifted on March 5 that he had no ex-



Kristina Michaud did not receive an answer to her question about compensation for the Gaspésie Railway Society.

Photo: G. Gagné

pectations regarding the eventual payments of compensations by the federal government even if the transporter lost \$500,000 in revenues during the blockade.

The premier of Quebec, François Legault, mentioned that he would seek compensations from the federal government but he has remained discrete about the issue since March 5.

Meanwhile, rail traffic was slowly getting back to normal on March 10, as the 150 cars loaded with windmill blades, cement, lumber and woodchips stranded during the blockade had left the Gaspé

Peninsula line.

An empty windmill blade train entered the line in Matapédia and was sent to New Richmond on the morning of March 11. That traffic is the biggest source of revenues for the Gaspésie Railway Society and its management was very worried about the possibility of losing the hauling contract with GE (General Electric), the company controlling LM Windpower, the owner of the Gaspé plant.

On March 10, Luc Lévesque expressed "reasonable optimism," regarding the probability of keeping that contract.