

Adjournment Debate

What happened was that on May 13, like the workers outside our doorstep today, enough was enough. They basically rallied in frustration, losing their pay per day, and they stayed here several days and many of them could not afford it. But they basically appealed to Parliament to listen to their concerns. We presented on a parliamentary day that we initiated an entire parliamentary debate focused on the trucking industry. We were not strident, we were not negative. We offered a nine-point program which we felt with all sincerity was legitimately addressing the concerns presented to us. That was on May 17, and the minister promised to look at it, to release the reports and take action on the recommendation of the reports. It is now September 16 and nothing has happened. The minister has said nothing and done nothing. What I am advocating and what we are hoping for, Mr. Speaker, with the fresh start that presents itself to the Chamber and to the government particularly, as fall is a symbolic start of any school or of any chamber, we are looking for a symbolic and a very practical change of heart as it relates to the trucking industry. I hope my hon. friends on the other side will begin that process today with an answer and with a promise to make things better.

Mr. Lee Richardson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the hon. member has raised this issue today so that we can get a few facts on the table.

The Minister of Transport has had several productive meetings with the task force on trucking issues. This task force was established last year to give the industry a forum for discussion of industry problems and for consultation with the government. Members of the task force represent shippers, carriers, unions and owner-operators. Last July the minister advised the task force that the government is prepared to consider the need for some form of transitional assistance to the industry and asked for their input.

The Minister of Transport and the Minister of State for Transport met again last week with the task force. At that meeting the task force gave the ministers their recommendations for transitional assistance. As the minister explained at that meeting, the next step will be for him to take these recommendations both to his provincial and federal colleagues. It is the minister's intention to meet with his provincial colleagues in

Winnipeg later this week. Provincial participation is clearly a key element.

It is interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, as I am sure the hon. member has, that studies on the trans-border trucking competitiveness that were commissioned by the task force did not substantiate the claims from the opposite side of the House about the tax burden for our truckers. Indeed, the studies proved that because of the introduction of the GST, the tax burden of Canadian truckers is about the same as that of American truckers. In fact, Mr. Speaker, as a result of the goods and services tax, the federal tax on diesel fuel has actually been reduced by three cents a litre.

I am very aware, as is this government, that the trucking industry has been hard hit by the recession. Thankfully though we have begun to hear from sources both inside and outside the industry that the outlook for the future is improving as the recession ends.

The Minister of Transport is committed to fostering a Canadian trucking industry that meets the needs of the Canadian economy and a strong economy will benefit all participants in the trucking industry itself.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Lyle Vanclief (Prince Edward—Hastings): Mr. Speaker, on May 31 of this year I asked a question of the Minister of Agriculture regarding the situation faced by the fresh apple industry in Canada.

The Canada Farm Products Marketing Council has recommended to the minister the establishment of a national marketing agency for fresh apples. This was after the council held hearings in the fall of 1990 across the country, especially in the five major apple growing provinces.

I was pleased that in his answer on May 31 that the minister indicated he would do what the growers asked him to do. And I am here again tonight to stress that I hope the minister follows up on that.

The apple industry, the fresh apple industry in particular, but all of the industry—but we are talking about the fresh apple industry here this evening—is an important industry. There are 8,000 apple farmers in Canada, producing 500,000 tonnes of apples per year and employing 15,000 Canadians.