

Considering that his government was invited to a meeting that is taking place next week in Regina, in which all the western governments will be participating, and the Government of Canada has been invited to participate to discuss grain handling, including the Crow, why is it that this government, which has talked about the need for consensus, turned down the invitation to this meeting in which it would have a thorough opportunity to meet with the premiers and discuss why, at least from their perspective as western Canadians, it is absolutely essential to maintain the Crow rate?

**Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister):** Madam Speaker, the answer to that is very simply that for years I have been attempting to get the western premiers to discuss this matter and to reach a consensus on it. Since the Western Economic Opportunities Conference in the early 1970s, we have been trying to come to grips with this. As the hon. member just said, the western premiers cannot agree among themselves in this area, which is largely under federal jurisdiction. That is why we decided to move.

As to the suggestion by Premier Blakeney to have a meeting in Regina on this subject, I think it is a little late in the day. He knows that for years we have been trying to get this matter discussed with them. He prefers to have a meeting on an area essentially under federal jurisdiction which he convenes, and to which he summons us to attend, and for which he no doubt thinks he will get a lot of electoral support in the west. Maybe that is possible. However, we have not made this an electoral matter. The proof is that the hon. member reminds us that we do not have many members in the west.

We are trying to find in the west a solution to a 90-year-old problem, a solution which will bring the transportation system into the end of the twentieth century, rather than once again thinking that there can be no possible change to something that was agreed to in the late 1890s without incurring the wrath of the reactionary sitting NDP.

#### REASONS FOR DECLINING INVITATION

**Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa):** Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister may think that his smart-aleck rhetoric about reactionary or any other equivalent term will carry weight among his backbenchers. I can assure him it means nothing to the people of Canada. Since the Prime Minister said there should be an attempt for consensus, and since the Conservative government of Alberta will be attending the conference, as well as the Social Credit government of British Columbia, and the two NDP governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, why is the federal Liberal Party of Canada so arrogant and indifferent that it is turning down an offer to sit down and discuss this seriously with the representatives of western Canada?

**Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister):** Madam Speaker, the hon. member is showing an interest in this matter very late in the day. I have told him that for years we have been attempting to discuss this matter and to create a consen-

sus among the premiers. We have not managed to move Premier Blakeney from his stand that nothing must be done to the Crow. Therefore, the purpose of this meeting is one which I can only suspect has been based on crass electoralism.

**Mr. Broadbent:** Find out!

**Mr. Trudeau:** We are finding out, but not in this context. I believe it is next Monday that the members of the western affairs committee will be sitting down with the Manitoba cabinet to discuss this very matter. We are willing to discuss it, but we do not think it should be an occasion for grandstanding. That is why we are continuing to discuss it in this way.

#### REQUEST THAT MINISTER PROTECT WESTERN GRAIN PRODUCERS

**Mr. Doug Neil (Moose Jaw):** Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture. The statement of the Minister of Transport this morning in Winnipeg ostensibly freezes the federal government's contribution to the railways with respect to the shortfall between the Crow rate and the compensatory rate at the 1981-82 level. This places the burden of future increases in rates on the producers which, by 1987, will be in the neighbourhood of half a billion dollars. The minister is aware that, because of the high input costs, the high interest rates and low prices for grain, the western grain producers are in serious financial difficulty.

The minister is responsible for the welfare of the western farmer. I would ask him what guarantees he is prepared to give to protect the interests of the western grain producer. Has he discussed with his cabinet colleagues the disastrous effect that this government policy, of throwing the burden on the grain producers, will have on the financial future of the grain producers?

**Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture):** Madam Speaker, I disagree with the hon. member's statement that we have decided to throw the burden on the grain producer. That is not factual. We are asking the grain producer to share part of the burden of the cost of transportation. If we continue with the same old program, which will be 85 years old this year, and a lot of the other programs in agriculture that we used 85 years ago, I am sure the hon. member realizes as well as I do that we would not be producing anything like as much as we are producing in Canada today.

This has to be changed. By the year 1985 we would not even be paying 20 per cent of the cost of grain transportation. By the year 1990 we would only be paying 7 per cent of the cost of grain transportation. I met with many hundreds of farmers in western Canada and discussed this issue with them. I found a consensus there that they are willing to talk, negotiate, and accept some change.

Yes, I was in cabinet when we discussed this. I have been a proponent of adjusting the Crow rate for many months, actually several years. I proposed that an adjustment in the Crow rate take place. We are not saying that we are going to abandon the farmers under this program. When the hon.