

getting \$10 million to build a road north, but no one can really recall what happened beyond that.

The Western Economic Opportunities Conference was convened as the result of a federal government initiative, the first such initiative in history. The achievements of that conference included agreement with British Columbia covering the expansion of the port of Prince Rupert, and the CNR and BC rail facilities in Northern British Columbia. The total cost, in one program alone, will exceed \$200 million. There was also a commitment to construct a vital rail bypass in British Columbia to facilitate the movement of Prairie grain to market, and to rationalize shipping by rail in southern British Columbia. The conference also brought about a reference to the Canadian Transport Commission of specific freight rates perceived as discriminatory, and a commitment to add to the reference further instances as requested by provincial governments.

In the Speech from the Throne we find specific references to the removal of freight rate anomalies in Western Canada. Despite all of this, one of the Western premiers went on national television last night and said, "Well, we are deeply disappointed because the Throne Speech terms are too vague." Well, any premier knows that a Speech from the Throne sets out the general program of the government, with the specifics following later. That kind of niggling criticism is not going to help Western Canada.

The Western Economic Opportunities Conference resulted in a commitment to establish a joint federal-western provinces committee on transportation. Other results of that conference were the imposition of an 18-month freeze on unprotected branch lines; agreement on full intergovernmental disclosure of cost data relative to railroad and trucking freight rates; an offer to Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba to share 50-50 the cost of updating their primary highway network to the same capacity as presently pertains in the province of British Columbia; an offer to Alberta to establish a jointly funded Alberta coal resource evaluation program; a proposed agreement for mineral development for northwestern British Columbia and northern Saskatchewan; a commitment to decentralize DREE, placing 70 per cent of the personnel at regional and provincial offices and to delegate decision-making on regional development incentive grants to the decentralized offices; the decentralization of the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce, which is now under way; and a commitment to propose an amendment to the Bank Act that will permit a provincial government to own, initially, up to 25 per cent of the voting shares of a new chartered bank, with provision for reduction of the holding to 10 per cent over a period of time.

In the light of these achievements, most of the people who say that they are "deeply disappointed" and that the federal government "still does not understand them" are, I fear, pursuing political motives rather than motives which might benefit Western Canada.

The Speech from the Throne talks in terms of guaranteed loans for farmers and fishermen; amendments to the Export and Import Permits Act to provide the government with better means to stabilize the Canadian market; improved harbour facilities; measures for facilitating agricultural stabilization; assistance to young farmers;

[Hon. Mr. Perrault.]

better veterinary training facilities; a prairie grain market insurance plan; improvements in Canadian grain rail transportation capabilities, and so forth. I wonder what the game of the critics really is when they criticize one of the most constructive programs for the West ever brought before a Parliament of Canada?

● (1530)

As much as I am a strong advocate of Western development, I believe just as strongly that this government must be given full credit for its remarkable efforts to consider the legitimate problems and aspirations of the West and, where possible, to provide appropriate solutions. I reject out of hand, as do most thinking Westerners, the senseless and patently political allegation that the present government "cares nothing" about Western Canada, the absurd nonsense that surfaces in commentaries across the country from time to time.

The fact is that Canada has never been an easy nation to govern. It is very difficult to design programs that will be equally effective in all parts of the country. Every region has had its problems with Confederation. I have had many opportunities to discuss with my good friends in the Maritimes some of their problems within Confederation; they have been plenty, and they need attention. I think there should be a maritime regional conference convened, if one is not already in the planning stage, of the kind we had in Calgary a few months ago. I have the deepest sympathy with my friends in the Maritimes.

I have travelled in Ontario, Quebec and the Yukon, and nobody regards Confederation as perfect, but we know very well it is better to hang together, that Confederation confers benefits that go far beyond any special regional problems that we may have. Perhaps one of the greatest miracles of all is the fact that Canada, despite its differences, and at times conflicting interests in its regions, came into existence in the first place.

Despite our problems, Canada has probably made more progress in the 106 years of its existence than any other nation on the face of the earth. We have done this despite some regional problems that we have had—some in the West, some in the East, and some in the Central provinces. We have achieved a great deal, despite what many feel to be certain impediments to our progress.

Honourable senators, I expect to be a part of many other Western delegations seeking more favourable consideration of some of our problems, but I do feel it is time to state emphatically that this government has acted with greater vigour to solve Western problems than any other government in history, that much of the alleged "Western alienation," to the extent that it exists, is in great measure the product of politically hungry and cynical men.

Westerners want to see greater decentralization of public institutions. This is one of our goals. We believe that decentralization means more regional autonomy, more policies tailored and attuned to local needs. The question of rural depopulation and undesirable changes in the social fabric of small towns in rural Canada is an urgent concern in the West. There is a need for the West to have a bigger share in national economic questions. When the Speech from the Throne talks in terms of expanding the petrochemical industry, as a Westerner I hope that some of this expansion will take place in Western Canada