

Oral Questions

Mr. Pepin: When you ask someone in western Canada, particularly a farmer, "Would you look forward to having the best transportation system in the world?", he says yes.

An hon. Member: That has nothing to do with the Crow.

Mr. Pepin: When you ask him, "Would you accept an increase in the Crow rate?", he hesitates, of course. I found that when you put the two questions together the answer is usually that, "Yes indeed; if I was assured that the railway transportation system for grain would be much better, allowing me to make savings and produce more, I would look at the possibility of paying more." This is really the gist of the matter.

The group led by Dr. Gilson is trying to put together a framework that would give the western farmers that assurance that the western rail transportation system would meet with the criteria and the expectations of the farmers. If the hon. member wants to wait for another two or three months, I am sure this will be done and then he will be satisfied that there is a consensus on bridging those two desirable matters, that is, the best transportation system and the payment of a slightly higher rate for the transportation of grain.

COMMISSIONING OF POLL

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Madam Speaker, I wish the minister would respond to the question of why he is misleading the Canadian people. Why is he treating this issue so cynically?

In the same confidential document which I have with me, I have found out that the Government of Canada has taken a poll. The Liberal staff says this about the poll, "According to a poll conducted before the announcement . . ." and listen to this, ". . . westerners are misinformed on the basic economic and historical issues." Such arrogance! I ask the minister whether or not he can make that poll public, and tell us who paid for that poll. And finally can he assure us that he will not proceed to change the Crow rate in any way against the wishes of the people of western Canada, the people he is supposed to represent as Minister of Transport in this country?

● (1300)

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, with respect to misinformation, it is generally agreed that the perception of many in the west about the Crow, its origin and its true meaning, is wrong. One of those who contributed to that was my hon. friend, for example, in a speech he made a week ago. If we were to believe what he said, we would believe the Crow was part of the British North America Act as part of the confederation system.

Be that as it may, with respect to the poll which has been conducted, the policy of the government is well known. The poll was conducted, obviously, to get more information on public opinion on that subject. We have that now, and it is used to devise the best possible approach to the resolution of the problem.

LABOUR CONDITIONS

INQUIRY RESPECTING GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO COMBAT UNEMPLOYMENT

Hon. Walter Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Finance. I listened to his answers earlier with respect to programs the government has brought forward including manpower training, work sharing, and a whole host of other programs. The fact of the matter—and it is becoming clear to the country—is that all these programs have thus far shown themselves to be inadequate in terms of a real attack on unemployment and other problems facing Canadians. There is, for instance, 11 per cent unemployment in eastern Ontario and western Quebec, and if we add Ottawa-Hull the 29,000 people represented by that figure becomes 56,000 people, so there is a failure.

The minister has just rejected the suggestion of a conference involving all the economic players, including business, labour, and government. He has rejected that. Given his rejection, and given the failure thus far of the government's programs, what new initiatives does the minister plan? The House of Commons and the people of Canada are tired of the fluff he has handed us during this question period.

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I replied to a question from the hon. member for York-Peel in which he suggested a conference of premiers, trade unionists, and the private sector. I referred to the value there might be in a meeting with the premiers at this stage in view of the fact that we have so recently had a first ministers' conference.

However, I did not have the opportunity in my reply to refer to the additional fact that the government is presently undertaking a series of consultations with the private sector, not only to discuss the medium-term economic developments prospects for Canada but also to secure the views of the private sector on the current economic situation. I have had at least six consultations already in various parts of Canada, and I propose to continue that throughout the month of April. In that way I am fulfilling, at least in part, the suggestion made by the hon. member, namely, consultations with other players in the economy in the hope that out of the discussions fresh and better ideas might be brought to bear on the very difficult situation we have at the present time in the country.

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PETITIONS

TABLING OF REPORTS OF CLERK OF PETITIONS

Madam Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that the Clerk of the House has laid upon the Table reports of the Clerk of Petitions stating that he has examined the petitions presented by hon. members on Wednesday, April 7, 1982, and finds that the petitions meet the requirements of the Standing Orders as to form.