

THE CANADIAN ECONOMY

REPORT ON SURVEY OF LARGE CANADIAN CORPORATIONS

Mr. F. A. Philbrook (Halton): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance. Today, the *Toronto Globe and Mail* reported on a survey of 300 large Canadian corporations that a 16.2 per cent rise in business spending is indicated for 1979. Will the minister indicate the basis for this improved position of Canadian business and how it might relate specifically to government policies?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the question contains the answer: there is much more confidence in Canada than there was before.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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TRANSPORT

RAIL NETWORK FOR WESTERN CANADA—GOVERNMENT POLICY

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I have a question involving basic government policy which I should like to direct to the right hon. Prime Minister. It arises out of actions by the government when it fully accepted the recommendations of the Hall royal commission on the basic rail network for western Canada as government policy.

In light of the fact that the chairman of the Department of Transport's Prairie Rail Action Committee has called the basic network itself an irrational collection of lines derived from a series of politically expedient decisions, and that events show there is too much mileage in the basic network, can the Prime Minister advise whether this is a change in government thinking or policy? If not, will he ask the Minister of Transport to dismiss Mr. Anderson?

[Translation]

Mr. Charles Lapointe (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, this was discussed at length yesterday. The government was very prompt to consider the Hall commission report. Two days after its publication, it had already acted, through an order in council, to protect the more than 1,000 kilometers of tracks which, as recommended by Mr. Justice Hall, should be part of the permanent system. Afterwards, more than 1,444 kilometers of the network were included in a second category for further consideration, and that part of the network was referred for an in-depth study to the commission mentioned by the hon. member.

By 1980, I believe western farmers as well as other users will have at their disposal a permanent railway system which will allow them to move their goods most efficiently.

Oral Questions

[English]

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Speaker, I find it strange, when an officer of a commission appointed by the government flies in the face of government policy, that the Prime Minister will not deal with it and the minister's parliamentary secretary attempts to do so. The government has accepted the recommendation of Mr. Justice Hall as government policy, and Mr. Justice Hall also said that the task committed to the Prairie Rail Action Committee was premature and impossible of fulfilment within the time-frame given that committee.

● (1442)

May I ask the Prime Minister whether he will instruct the Minister of Transport and Minister of Justice to dismiss Mr. Anderson and disband the Prairie Rail Action Committee?

[Translation]

Mr. Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member may not like parliamentary secretaries to deal with matters which come under the ministers to whom they are assigned but I would remind him that all members on our side of the House agree we are fully entitled to look after matters related to grain transport or other relevant matters whenever they come under our responsibilities.

It may be true that Mr. Fred Anderson flies in the face of the government, as the hon. member put it, but I would remind him that in past months it did happen that Mr. Justice Hall referred to other conclusions which perhaps did not agree with government policy. Still I wonder if he agrees with one of Mr. Justice Hall's recommendations, for instance when he suggested that there is no need for more hopper cars in the fleet used for moving western grain.

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[English]

IMMIGRATION

ASYLUM IN CANADA FOR SOUTHEAST ASIAN REFUGEES

Mr. Jake Epp (Provencher): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration: it relates to the plight of the 2,500 refugees now on the high seas who have been trying to get to Malaysia as the country of first asylum. This matter, as the minister knows, was raised under Standing Order 43 by the hon. member for Parkdale.

I would ask the minister whether the Canadian government has contacted the United Nations high commissioner for refugee matters and committed Canada to accepting a number of these 2,500 refugees. If no contact has been made specifically in respect of these boat refugees, rather than the additional families regarding which the minister made a commitment earlier, will the minister indicate when contact will be made? If contact has been made, what has been the response?

Hon. Bud Cullen (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations high commissioner for