

Transportation

in *Hansard* at page 11959 for January 18, 1967. That amendment was voted down in the Committee of the Whole which studied that legislation by a vote of 59 to 58. I am told by hon. members who were here at that time that it was the Conservative Party which saw to it that the Crow rate remained in effect. Had we not done that, the Crow rate would have been long gone. Is it any wonder we feel some mistrust about some of the things which are going on in terms of the Crow rate?

I could go into the whole issue of the process and our feeling that Dr. Gilson should make his hearings as public as possible so that producers know exactly what is being said on their behalf behind the doors. I think that is very important. If Dr. Gilson cannot make his hearings public, he should be willing to hold press conferences with all parties involved after his sessions so that producers will know exactly what they are getting. This goes back to the old dictum of English jurisprudence that justice should not only be done but also be seen to be done. If we do not heed that dictum, no matter how glowingly the minister will describe the agreement that will be reached and subsequently come to the House in the form of legislation, if he does not make producers understand that they are being treated fairly, it will not work and we will be worse off than if we had left the whole thing alone.

● (1640)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I thank the opposition for giving the government this opportunity today to debate the merits of our February 8 announcement about expanding western railway capacity. My colleagues and I welcome the chance to correct any wrong impressions that some hon. members may have had about the government's intention in acting on the grain transportation issue at this time.

This is a subject of utmost importance for all Canadians, particularly the citizens of the four western provinces. It deserves to be given a full and informed discussion, both in the House and in the country. But there can be no informed discussion of this issue while some are basing their opinions on myths and misconceptions.

With your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, I think it would be useful if I took a few minutes to clear up some of these unfounded points of contention.

The first is the accusation that the federal government is unilaterally imposing a change in the Crow rate on western grain producers. This is certainly not the case. As the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) made clear in his announcement of the government's decision, our action at the present time is a response to a series of requests from various groups in the west, including most farm organizations. It should not be forgotten that the Western Agriculture Conference and the Prairie Farm Commodity Coalition had petitioned us to do something to improve western railway capacity. In making this request, both groups had put forward their own suggestions about possible

solutions to the problem. These positions included a recognition that the grain producer should pay more to ship grain in exchange for an improved level of service.

Moreover, the government has not chosen simply to impose a new rate structure in place of the existing statutory rates. It has put up a strong financial commitment to improving the railway system through branch line rehabilitation and the purchase of an additional 1,280 hopper cars. And it is offering to bridge the current Crow gap with public moneys and to confirm this ongoing benefit to western grain growers in legislation. As we pointed out in our announcement, grain will continue to have a special status where transportation is concerned.

The Government of Canada is willing to spend \$3.2 billion over the next four years on western grain transportation. This is the public's contribution to solving the impasse over the Crow rate which has existed for a number of years. It amounts to about \$23,000 for every grain grower in the west. Now we are turning to the private sector, to the railway companies and the western farmers and asking what their contribution will be.

The government is not imposing its will on the west, as some critics have said. It is acting responsibly and very much in the interests of western Canadians—especially farmers—and is looking for a shared solution that is worked out in consultation with the groups affected.

Another piece of misinformation that has been spread by the critics is the notion that the federal government has already made up its mind about all the issues like variable rates, how much the farmers should pay, how the Crow benefit will be paid out and so on. They say that the consultations led by Dr. Gilson will be just a sham.

That is not true. The government is bargaining in good faith. We have not made any final decisions about variable rates, the manner in which the government will pay the Crow benefit, nor any hard and fast formulas on how much producers should pay for transporting grain in future years. The government's position is outlined in the policy statement issued on February 8. That is the framework we have established for Dr. Gilson's discussions with the railways and farmers. Nothing more and nothing less.

I know that there have been some other pieces of paper floating around and a lot of talk about leaked cabinet documents. I see the hon. member opposite who was minister of transport in the last Conservative government is in the House.

Mr. Mazankowski: I know nothing about them.

Mr. Whelan: As he knows and as anyone who has been in cabinet knows, officials may submit several documents to a minister before one is accepted. Officials had presented the various documents to my cabinet colleagues and I, in consideration of this issue and some of the information, was questioned. Perhaps some of the documents that the official opposition found when it was in government are documents which we discarded. They could come into my office today and look at my desk. If there is anything secret there that they want, they can have it. There are probably some of those old