

Oral Questions

The hon. member, as a member of Parliament, would not want me to preclude the judgment of his colleagues who have spent a great deal of time listening to Canadians, or preclude the judgment of many Canadians who have bothered to take the time to write in to give their contributions, by simply making an arbitrary judgment, as it seems the Bloc has done, before listening to the Canadian people.

• (1455)

[Translation]

Mr. Laurent Lavigne (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that people have already been waiting for quite a while. Everybody is aware of the minister's proposal and even Ontario has expressed some opposition.

How can the minister claim to represent a flexible federalism when he threatens to retaliate against the government of Ontario if it continues to make public its resistance to the proposed reform?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the one thing that will never lead to co-operative or flexible federalism is the kind of fearmongering the hon. member has just engaged in. I have never made suggestions or threats of the kind the hon. member suggested. He should withdraw that remark. It is not based on any fact or any presupposition.

I would simply say to him that at this time the broad majority of Canadians want some change. They want governments to work together on change. They want us to find the best ways to spend our money.

I keep saying the only group that seems to be objecting continually without analysing or considering the options is the Bloc Quebecois. It is simply standing in the way of Canadians getting what they want, which is a much better, more effective social system that will help people get back to work.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. Jake E. Hoepfner (Lisgar—Marquette, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

In 1983 the government implemented the Western Grain Transportation Act that gave railways guaranteed returns on investments and operating expenses. Not only was it a licence to print money. It also allowed railways to become inefficient and non-performing since they were paid regardless of how they moved prairie grain.

Is the minister now proposing to offload past Liberal mistakes on to farmers in the form of a cash buyout?

Hon. Ralph E. Goodale (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member knows the Minister of Transport and I are working on a set of proposals for comprehensive reform of the Canadian grain handling and transportation system. That obviously includes a very detailed examination of existing legislation in the form of the Western Grain Transportation Act.

In terms of a consultative process, a very extensive process is now under way by both the Minister of Transport and myself consulting with farm organizations, farmers and all other stakeholders in the grain transportation system. Our objective is to collect all their recommendations and advice toward the end of this year or the very early part of 1995 so that early in the new year we can put before our cabinet colleagues a set of proposals to deal with some longstanding issues in our grain handling and transportation system.

Our objective, in the final analysis, is to ensure we position the country to compete with the rest of the world and win in our grain sector.

Mr. Jake E. Hoepfner (Lisgar—Marquette, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the minister knows very well that three prairie premiers insist that the Western Grain Transportation Act represents an inherent right promised to prairie provinces. They also insist that none of these moneys go into the east and that they stay in the west.

Is the minister prepared to put these funds into a safety net program that will offset the effects of U.S. and European subsidized products in the form of a trade distortion adjustment program?

Hon. Ralph E. Goodale (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a variety of proposals are under consideration. Some of those proposals come from the producer payment panel, which was a consultative process that ultimately reported publicly in June of this year. There have been other proposals in terms of the structure of the method of payment that have come from the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Various farm organizations have come forward with other alternatives. There is clearly a difference in view among farmers and farm organizations in western Canada on whether the funds either partially or totally should be dedicated to some kind of a safety net system. That is one of the alternatives on the table.

However I must tell the hon. gentleman that thus far in the consultations we have had with farmers and farm organizations the recommendations and advice we are receiving are very much against the notion of folding the funds into any kind of safety net.