

Oral Questions

Railway management to make improvements in benefits for their pensioners and to cease and desist from attempts to contract out work, particularly with respect to maintenance of way, and if they will negotiate—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, no doubt the hon. member's message is getting through, but so far as I am concerned I would not maintain the position of neutrality which the hon. member advises me to maintain.

B.C.—REQUEST FOR PROGRESS REPORT ON LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Labour. In view of the fact that there has been a long and unpleasant strike in British Columbia, involving the management and employees of British Columbia Tel, and in view of the fact that rumours are circulating that the strike has either been settled or is on the verge of settlement, can the minister report to the House on the situation?

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Labour): Yes, Mr. Speaker. This is a happy occasion for me because I am advised that there is every expectation that a settlement of that bitter dispute will be reached. There are still things to be worked out in the work agreement area. I will be in the hon. member's city tomorrow, and I will be in a position to make a final assessment of how close to conclusion the settlement is, but I am confident that the matter can be settled.

Mr. Fraser: Can the minister give us his assurance that in any discussions he will have—I refer especially to complications which might still exist with respect to working out back to work arrangements—he will follow the advice he has been taking lately, and the position which I have always taken, that politicians refrain from commenting until the delicate negotiations are completed?

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): There is no question about it, Mr. Speaker.

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GRAIN

WHEAT—SALE AT BELOW COST OF PRODUCTION—DELAY IN SHIPPING

Mr. Frank Hamilton (Swift Current-Maple Creek): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board. Yesterday the minister confirmed the worst fears of the prairie grain farmers, that not only are we sold out of wheat this year at below the cost of production but also at below the initial price, which means no payments to farmers next spring. At a time when wheat prices are steadily rising, and with the revelation that public money will be required to balance the pool account for wheat, will the minister now have the Auditor General report on Canadian

[Mr. Benjamin.]

Wheat Board accounts, especially in view of the suspiciously large wheat payment now in the mail in this election year to a quarter of a million producers?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, it is really astonishing how the hon. member can launch an attack against the Canadian Wheat Board and combine it with the fact that the government has to its credit the holding of the initial price at higher levels than we considered safe at the time we set them. It is well known that that was the case. We did that for a variety of reasons, including the fact that we wanted to take the cost of production into account, the fact that with the stabilization plan we knew there was an offset in any case, and that with international agreement discussions forthcoming we wanted to be sure that the world would recognize we did not believe a price below \$3 a bushel for our wheat was adequate.

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Notwithstanding that, at that time the Canadian Wheat Board continued to compete vigorously for markets, using its best judgment, and if the hon. member really means to attack the board, its process and its judgment, like so many members of his party are apt to do, let him say so clearly. The board used its best judgment and it made sales, while some of the hon. member's colleagues—including premiers who are members of his party in other parts of the country—attacked the board for not being vigorous enough. The Canadian Wheat Board is, in fact, setting a record in terms of sales.

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Hamilton (Swift Current-Maple Creek): Mr. Speaker, the minister's flippant answer does not bother me, but I wish he would show more concern for the well-being of the half million people on the prairies who depend on the grain industry for their livelihood.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hamilton (Swift Current-Maple Creek): As the minister continually blames unreliable vessel arrivals for the annual pile-up of shipping in Vancouver, which is once again costing farmers millions of dollars in demurrage charges and is jeopardizing our growing Asian trade, does the minister still get his Asian shipping intelligence from our good friends in a downtown Chinese laundry?

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, again the hon. member seems to neglect the fact that with \$200 million going out in final payments and with a probable payment under the stabilization plan, we have done a great deal to safeguard the income of farmers. The lack of logic in his position is apparent when he talks about demurrage charges being a worry to the farmer. In fact, when there is a deficit in the pool, it should be obvious even to the hon. member that that payment falls to the government, rather than to the farmer. The truth is that there was a delay in the arrival of ships.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!