

Adjournment Debate

[Translation]

Mr. Léopold Corriveau (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member said, and I quote:

... the undertaking by the former minister of agriculture that Canada would import more farm machinery from other countries ...

I should like to say at the start, Mr. Speaker, that although I have not been able to find texts in which the former minister gave such an assurance, I know that he tried to limit the prices of farm machinery by encouraging more competition. This was in line with a recommendation by the Barber Commission, which promoted negotiations and discussions aimed at making tractors from unaccustomed sources available to Canadian farmers.

For that purpose he will be meeting with delegations, officials and other representatives from such countries as Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Japan as well as officials from other countries including the USSR.

Since his appointment the present Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) also had discussions on the subject and undoubtedly there will be other initiatives in that field.

Tractors and other farm machinery from those countries are now available in Canada. I am convinced that all hon. members will agree with me that the government should intervene in purchases of farm machinery for farmers only to reduce import problems to a minimum. I would like to remind hon. members that equipment such as tractors enter Canada duty-free.

As several members know, the building of new lines of farm machinery in a foreign country results in various problems, the main one being undoubtedly the knowledge of our marketing methods to guarantee an adequate supply of machines and spare parts as well as adequate service. Solving those problems required more time than anticipated; however, there is a renewed interest in some countries for exporting farm machinery in Canada and it is hoped that the plans and ambitions of the department will meet some degree of success.

[English]

TRANSPORT—ALLEGED DETERIORATION IN WESTERN CANADA RAILWAY PASSENGER SERVICE—REQUEST FOR INVESTIGATION

Mr. Douglas Roche (Edmonton-Strathcona): Mr. Speaker, on March 8 I asked the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) to find ways to improve rail service between Edmonton and Calgary and I specifically cited instances where passengers had to stand in the baggage car for want of seating accommodation. I gave the minister the names of individuals who had been so affected, and I am sure that proper apologies have been proffered. But that does not alter the central question I raised. What are the government's plans to save the railways as a vital means of passenger transportation in an age dominated by jets and big airports?

Transportation is the lifeline of western Canada and improved transportation is essential for its continued development. Unfortunately, rail transportation has become an unwanted stepchild and it is time for the Minister of Transport and the railway companies to listen

[Mr. Nystrom.]

to the protests of western Canadians who want, and need, the kind of service the railways were subsidized by government to provide. As an example, a fast and efficient passenger train between Edmonton and Calgary is not a luxury but a necessity. The return air fare between the two cities is beyond the reach of the ordinary traveller or businessman. As Art Evans, a columnist for the *Edmonton Journal*, put it in a recent article:

The air fare between Alberta's two major cities is now \$18 one way. On a round trip, taking one taxi fare at each end, you're now looking at \$40, a fair bite and one that only an expense account can handle regularly without wincing.

Mr. Evans feels, as I do, that one fast train making daily runs between Edmonton and Calgary would have no trouble attracting passengers, especially if the round trip fare were lowered to \$10. It is not just lack of seating on the Edmonton-Calgary line that is involved; it is the generally haphazard way the Dayliner is operated. For example, no businessman is going to take the train to Calgary if it makes four stops. Why could we not have a daily fast train, non-stop or with only one stop at Red Deer? This would bring travellers to downtown Calgary from the heart of Edmonton in two or two and a half hours. Increased efforts should also be made to provide clean cars and food.

The railway committee of the Canadian Transport Committee has asked for a study of passenger service throughout the country. Well, let the voice of Albertans who have been deprived of efficient and economical rail transportation be heard. Let the voice of Edmontonians who are fed up with the lack of action in getting rid of the level crossing on Whyte Avenue, the main street of south Edmonton, be heard.

● (2220)

Obviously, a piecemeal approach is not the solution. What is needed is a comprehensive program to improve service, serve passengers and lower freight rates. Why has the minister refused to set out a transportation policy which would serve the total transportation needs of western Canada? We know now that only such an all-embracing policy will broaden the industrial base of Alberta.

The facts are clear. The railways have discontinued rail passenger service at a number of Alberta communities. This adversely affects their social and economic development as well as the development of the province as a whole. Such communities are crippled in trying to attract industry. In other words, lack of federal concern about the needs of Alberta's communities hampers the economic and social wellbeing of the province. The cost to the public is one of those hidden expenses that is smothered by the excessive layers of bureaucracy in Canada. I believe that where rail service is discontinued for perhaps valid reasons, the federal government should give a commitment to provide passenger service by alternate means. The Western Conference on Economic Opportunities is fast approaching. Albertans want action on transportation. The passengers who had to stand on the Edmonton-Calgary Dayliner are just the tip of a very large iceberg of protest.

I understand the Minister of Transport is out of the country attending a conference. I hope the absence of his parliamentary secretary, who is a western Canadian, is