

RAILWAYS

POLICY ON RAIL LINE ABANDONMENT

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the right hon. Prime Minister: it is of great concern to western farmers.

In 1974, in the context of an election campaign then ongoing—more precisely, on June 14—the Prime Minister promised western farmers the Government of Canada would not abandon rail service branch lines as long as elevator companies considered that continued rail service was warranted. That was the promise of the Prime Minister.

Considering that last week the Prairie Rail Action Committee report recommended abandonment of 38 sections of rail line, among others—this fits precisely within the framework promised by the Prime Minister in June of 1974—will the Prime Minister assure the House that these lines he committed himself to in 1974 will be preserved in 1979?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Charles Lapointe (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, the measures this government has been taking since 1974 to improve the grain transportation system in the west are very important. Just think of the \$700 million which will be spent in the next six years to improve the rail system in the west.

As for the PRAC recommendations, Mr. Speaker, a report was published about ten days ago asking in fact for the abandonment of some lines, but it is only a recommendation and it is the responsibility of the Canadian Transport Commission to decide whether those railway lines will be abandoned or not.

[*English*]

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Prime Minister: I hope he will answer it. It is not a question which requires detailed knowledge; it simply requires the Prime Minister to reiterate today the commitment he made in 1974.

In 1974, the Prime Minister promised western farmers the government would maintain the 38 lines which were not all concerned with the PRAC recommendation but which fit into his criteria. Will the Prime Minister now reassert that commitment, to ensure that western farmers receive today what was promised then?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. Leader of the New Democratic Party had listened to the answer, he would know and he would not have to repeat the question. The commitment made has been honoured and respected until now.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Nonsense.

An hon. Member: It certainly has.

Oral Questions

Mr. Trudeau: The right hon. member speaks for himself, but I am talking to the Leader of the New Democratic Party.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I know, and I speak to you.

Mr. Trudeau: I think we have the great expert on nonsense talking nonsense at this point.

Mr. Diefenbaker: It is a complete deception.

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I realize you might want to recognize the right hon. member for Prince Albert. I understand this morning he had a tough time with the hon. member for Rosedale, but that is no reason to take it out on me.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: We have honoured that commitment. Now we have a respectable body which is making a contrary recommendation.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

● (1425)

Mr. Trudeau: The parliamentary secretary is perfectly correct in saying they will be looked at by the CTC and acted upon by it.

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, I listened to the parliamentary secretary with almost as much attention as I listen to the Prime Minister's answers.

The Minister of Transport cannot be here today because of other commitments—and I understand that—but last week he said in Saskatchewan that the PRAC recommendations as a whole would be referred to the CTC for consideration. I ask the Prime Minister whether he would not distinguish between those lines which he said should be preserved and those which are still contentious, and simply refer the seven or eight lines that are outside his commitment to the CTC for consideration. Will the Prime Minister not now commit himself, in 1979, to the western farmers as he did in the context of an election promise in 1974?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, we are not changing any policy. I am just saying that the CTC has the right and the duty to pronounce itself upon these recommendations and we will see what its answer is.

* * *

[*Translation*]

WELFARE

INQUIRY WHETHER GOVERNMENT AGREED WITH PROVINCES CONCERNING AMENDMENTS TO FAMILY ALLOWANCES ACT

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I should like to put a question to the Minister of National Health and Welfare.