

Oral Questions

would depress prices for the 500 fish-processing plants on the Atlantic coast.

That is why the Canadian Government has suggested that if all creditors were prepared to join in a co-operative effort with the Federal Government, together we would be able to prevent a veritable bankruptcy epidemic.

At this very moment, every single creditor of these sixty processing plants, with 45,000 jobs that are on the line, have agreed to the plan, except for the Government of Quebec, which has seized certain assets. We must not forget that if one creditor starts seizing assets, all others will follow suit in order to recover their losses, and in that case, all the efforts of the Canadian Government would be—

Madam Speaker: Order, order!

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[English]

RAILWAYS

CROWNSNEST PASS RATE—VARIABLE RATES PROPOSAL— CONSEQUENCES FOR BRANCH LINES

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport who made it plain at his press conference last week that variable rates would be in his legislation. I am sure the Minister is aware that Mr. Snavely, who did a lot of his consulting work, said that this will depopulate the Prairies, even though he agrees with the efforts of the Minister. Would the Minister tell us if he is going to continue to insist on installing the principle of variable rates, which will allow the railways to continue to abandon another 44 branch lines, or nearly 2,000 kilometres of railway in western Canada, which was their initial objective? Some of those lines are in the basic network.

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, obviously my hon. friend wants the best of both worlds. He does not want to see the Bill, yet he wants to see what is in the Bill. I believe we are going to decide on that in a few minutes, and in the following days I will have ample opportunity to answer any questions on that particular subject.

Mr. Benjamin: Madam Speaker, we could not care less if we never saw the Bill.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Benjamin: If the Minister would agree to withdraw it, go back to the drawing board and accept our alternative proposal, he would have no problems in western Canada.

REQUEST THAT GOVERNMENT TAKE EQUITY SHARES IN RAILWAYS

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Madam Speaker, since statutory grain rates and rehabilitation of main railway lines in

western Canada are two entirely separate issues, and since only about 15 per cent of track capacity will be used to haul grain, it is obvious, contrary to the mythology perpetuated by the Minister and others, that the railways will be rehabilitated to haul all commodities and people, not just grain. Does the Minister agree that he and the Government have a responsibility to protect the investment of the taxpayers of Canada for capital improvements on the railways, and obtain a return on that investment by way of dividends, by taking equity shares in the railways in return for the capital investment?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, I can only repeat the answers I have already given. My hon. friend says he could not care less if he never saw the Bill. I was in the West on Friday. My hon. friend, the Minister of Agriculture, was there yesterday. Everyone we met said, before committing himself or herself one way or the other, "We want to see the Bill." This afternoon at a press conference I will have a chance to quote from different farm and other organizations in the West, way back to 1981, asking the Government to come up with a Bill on the Crowsnest rate. That has been said in the West for three years now, and I will demonstrate it by quoting from these people this afternoon. That is what we are doing.

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REGIONAL ECONOMIC EXPANSION

FISHERIES RELATED INDUSTRIES

Hon. J. Robert Howie (York-Sunbury): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion. The Minister of Fisheries has announced plans to spend \$140.7 million—\$12.2 million of it in New Brunswick—"to give tools to fishermen to improve their profession." He has indicated some very interesting programs to achieve that purpose. In view of the serious structural problems which have been identified in the fishing industry in Atlantic Canada and in Quebec, will the Minister tell the House if his Department has accepted, as a special target, the development of fishing related industries in Atlantic Canada and Quebec, such as the manufacture of deck hardware, navigational aids, fishing equipment, and medicines and chemicals from ocean resources, these industries where the big bucks are really being made?

Hon. Ed Lumley (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce and Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Madam Speaker, first of all I would like to join with the honourable member in congratulating the Minister of Fisheries on the tremendous initiative which he has taken for the whole fisheries industry.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!