

Transportation

Where will we find a 65 per cent increase in sales of our livestock production talked about in such rosy terms by the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) and the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan)? Where is the market? There is none. What is the incentive? Producers are now losing between 18 and 20 cents a pound. They are losing between \$200 and \$300 on each animal. What kind of incentive is that?

If we follow the bookkeeping or Snavely kind of economics, it will cost \$12.50 to produce a bushel of wheat. What compensation will there be for the farmer? If that kind of economics and accounting is good enough for the railways, why does it not make sense for the farmers? Why does it not apply to agriculture? It is grossly unfair to look only at this in terms of the railway package and commitment. If this is going to be opened up, it should be opened up all the way. Look at the compensation which was received in the past. Put that into present day values. At least make it fair on both sides of the table.

At the moment the farmers are being asked to give up the agreement. The railways are getting off scot-free. That is grossly unfair. We say the Crow rate should be kept and the system should be improved. It would be disruptive to all of Canada to do away with it.

[Translation]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It being one o'clock, I do now leave the chair until two o'clock.

At one o'clock the House took recess.

[English]

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, recently I just spent a number of days in the west, in Delisle and Lethbridge, among other places. I met a number of people there who were wondering—and more of them are wondering—what kind of minister of transport my hon. friend from Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski) would have been if he had had the good fortune to remain minister of transport for a longer period of time.

One way to answer this question is to see what he was asking of me this morning and judge him, at least in part, by that. He mentioned six or seven conditions I should have met prior to presenting the policy on western transportation.

First, he said that I should have held an inquiry of some sort. He is not satisfied with the degree of inquiry that has taken place up to now. Presumably the inquiry he asks for would have taken some time. I might say that his view does not correspond to the generality of views expressed to me by westerners. Nevertheless, he would have asked me to have an inquiry.

Second, he mentioned that there should have been a study by Parliament. Presumably what he has in mind is a committee of the House of Commons which would analyse the issue in depth. This would also have taken time.

He suggested, with a smile, that I should have a change made in the resolutions of the Liberal Party on the Crow rate. That might have taken a few days or months—

Mr. Lewis: Or years.

Mr. Pepin: That is assuming one is not satisfied with the present resolution, which I am.

He also mentioned that I should have had a national mandate, presumably in an election of some kind. We would have had to wait another few years for that.

He also mentioned I should have had some elected members from western Canada on this side of the House. That might be done faster but, nevertheless, it might take some time also.

Mr. Lewis: It might be difficult too.

Mr. Pepin: He also mentioned that I should be able clearly to demonstrate that the railways can and will carry grain in the most efficient way. I am satisfied that the railways are now able to do so but others might have taken more time to accept that proposition. Finally, he said that I should wait until all economic circumstances were more favourable.

I suggest very humbly and sincerely that he would have wanted me to wait and not do anything. The implication is that this is what he would have done. If he had practised what he is telling me to do he would not have remained very popular in the west.

Westerners believe that he would have done something to the Crow rate, but, again, if the hon. member had applied the same standards for himself which he is suggesting to me, we would be talking about it for years to come.

I believe that western Canada cannot wait that long. I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the need for a strengthening of the main line of the railway in western Canada is extremely urgent. If there is anything which is urgent, this is it.

Since I have already spent a considerable amount of time on the road explaining the statement we made on February 8 in Winnipeg, I will not dwell on it for long. However, it is an absolute necessity that people read and understand that statement well.

There are three essential parts to that statement. The first includes a number of firm principles that the government states as its own beliefs. These are firm principles and they will be found in the statutory document we will end up with at the end of this current exercise. The statutory framework itself is a firm concept. The adequate compensation concept of the railway is a firm concept although not yet defined in detail. It will be. The guarantee of the responsibilities of the railways is