

*Oral Questions*

questions about this very serious and, as the Minister said, historic announcement.

**Hon. Donald J. Johnston (Minister of State for Economic Development and Minister of State for Science and Technology):** Madam Speaker, the Minister is usually in the House. He will be in the House, and I am sure he will welcome any questions the Hon. Member wishes to put during Question Period.

## REASONS FOR GOVERNMENT ACTION

**Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa):** Madam Speaker, since a question of basic principle is involved in this important matter, I should like to go to the Prime Minister with a question.

A historic bargain was reached in this country on the Crowsnest Pass freight rate, according to which our prairie farmers were guaranteed a certain rate. In return the CPR got billions of dollars in land, mineral rights and other material. Canadians all across the land benefited from the value of export sales provided by our prairie farmers.

Considering that the Prime Minister has said a number of times in the House that no change in these historic freight rates would be made without a consensus coming from prairie farmers, would he explain to the House today why he and his Government have reneged so completely on this deal and sold our prairie farmers down the drain?

**Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister):** Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member is referring to my earlier statement about a consensus. I have had someone look up the report of what I said. It seems to me that I said we would do exactly what we have done. In *Hansard* for February 13, 1981, as reported at page 7213, I stated:

At the present time our policy is not to touch the Crow rate, but if there is a general feeling in the west that the question must be reopened, then we would be happy to do so.

I think it is fair to say that just about everyone in the West agreed that the Crow rate should be reopened and that the question should be looked at. If we look at the two largest umbrella groups in the West, the Western Agricultural Conference and the Prairie Farm Commodity Coalition, we see that they made it quite clear that the Government had to take action. We took action. The difference is that we knew that once we took action there would be the reactionaries, being both Parties in the Opposition, who would prefer to keep the status quo forever.

I think there is a realization amongst sensible people in the West that if we wanted to have a decent transportation system there had to be a reopening of the Crow. We reopened it and we brought about a solution after a great deal of consultation. The Gilson Commission participated in that consultation and came up with recommendations. We have had, I dare say, the courage to reopen this very difficult question when the NDP and the Tories would prefer to sit back and have no policy

position but to say that forever nothing must change in Canada.

**Mr. Broadbent:** Madam Speaker, the position of this Party is very clear. We want improvement in our grain handling system but we do not want the cost of that improvement to be forced on the backs of our prairie farmers. That is the issue.

## CONTRIBUTION BY RAILWAYS

**Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa):** I should like to put a supplementary question to the Prime Minister. Is he aware that, as a result of the announcement made today, the cost to our farmers will be about \$1 billion per year, while at the same time the CPR will continue to reap the benefits of the historic handouts that they got? If the Prime Minister acknowledges that that is the fact, then why is the Government of Canada using this method of improving our grain handling facilities? Why does the Government not make the CPR put up some money, or why does it not turn to some other sources of revenue to improve our railway system, instead of punishing prairie farmers?

• (1430)

**Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister):** Madam Speaker, under the arrangements which were arrived at, both railways will be investing some \$16.5 billion and all the taxpayers of Canada will be investing some \$3.7 billion. When the Hon. Member projects the costs of the farmer to the end of the decade, he forgets that in the proposal we are making there will be a reopening of this and a rediscussion of the issue in Parliament after the 1985-86 year.

I wonder if it is not reasonable or if it is inconceivable, with taxpayers paying a very large sum of \$3.7 billion—this is general taxpayers from all parts of Canada, from Nova Scotia to British Columbia—and with the railways, the CPR and the CNR, paying some \$16.5 billion to improve the rail system, that western farmers should also be asked to look at some of their costs, not in terms of the historic bargain because they are being guaranteed what they received in the past, but whether they should not be asked in all fairness to look at some part of the increased costs over the future. That is the position the Government has taken. That is the position, I must say, which has been reasonably supported by many influential farmers' groups in the West.

Naturally there is no absolute consensus because it is a very difficult problem. Nobody likes to pay anything if he can get somebody else to pay. Once again, given that the transportation system had to be completely changed, and given that the Crow rate, as was recognized increasingly by farmers themselves and their organizations, had to be looked at again, somebody had to come forth with a solution and somebody had to come forth with negative criticisms. It was predictable who would bring up solutions: a Government which is intent on axing—on acting and on reforming—

**Some Hon. Members:** On axing!