

Inquiries of the Ministry

direct my question to the Minister of Agriculture. In view of the fact that western farmers are suffering from a dire shortage of cash due to the low grain marketings, would the minister assure the house that the proposed legislation to provide double the amount of interest free cash advances on farm stored grain will receive top priority in the government's legislative program for this session?

Hon. H. A. Olson (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the priorities of the government's legislative program, I suppose this question would be more properly directed to the house leader or the Prime Minister. However, I think indications have been given a number of times through the press that this matter does have high priority now.

TRANSPORTATION**CONSIDERATION OF PROBLEMS OF ATLANTIC PROVINCES**

On the orders of the day:

Mr. Robert C. Coates (Cumberland-Colchester North): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Transport. Can the minister indicate the government's intentions with regard to the chronic and long time problems relating to transportation in the Atlantic provinces?

Hon. Paul Hellyer (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, we are concerned with this subject. It is one of very real importance not just to the region involved but to all of Canada. The Canadian Transportation Commission is undertaking studies in relation to the transportation problems of the Atlantic region and I hope they will have a report, at least of an interim nature, perhaps some time later this year.

In addition, we still hope some ideas will be coming forward from the Atlantic premiers. We can discuss later all the ideas which are available, in the hope that we can do something constructive to improve the transportation facilities in that part of the country.

Mr. Coates: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Would the minister indicate whether it is his intention to have the standing committee on transport and communications once again visit the area and receive briefs? Would he also indicate whether the government intends to provide any special assistance with regard to the l.c.l. rates that have

[Mr. Southam.]

been imposed, which are exorbitant and are causing great hardship at the present time to shippers in the Atlantic provinces?

Mr. Hellyer: On the first question, Mr. Speaker, the government's position has not changed in respect of a possible visit of the parliamentary committee to the Atlantic region. This is a matter that will have to be considered by the committee when it is formed and has chosen a chairman. We will be glad to discuss with the committee, through the chairman, what might be done once the committee is formed. With regard to the second question, I am not in a position to comment in detail at this moment.

Mr. James McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Could the minister indicate whether he has received protests regarding the abandonment of the C.N. passenger service in Newfoundland and the decision of the Canadian Transport Commission in relation thereto, and what action is contemplated by the government?

Mr. Hellyer: I have received protests, Mr. Speaker. I think my hon. friend will agree that we all regret the abandonment of passenger services in various parts of the country. This is part of a change in the way of living of our society to which it is difficult to adjust, but my hon. friend will also agree that technological changes are taking place in our society and that the trend is to the greater use of aeroplanes and road transportation. It is also a fact that as the cost of train travel rises and the number of people who use the train service declines, it becomes increasingly impossible to maintain all the services which have been provided in the past. That is the reason, I presume, the Canadian Transport Commission has allowed the abandonment. I regret, as does my hon. friend, the inconvenience caused to some people, but it seems to be part of a trend that is more or less irresistible.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, I have another supplementary question. Would the minister give consideration to withholding a decision in this matter until the committee has had a chance to sit in Newfoundland?

Mr. Hellyer: I am not sure I have the power to do that, Mr. Speaker. I think this is a matter for the Canadian Transport Commission. However, I believe this decision is subject to appeal, and to the best of my