

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

TRANSPORT

SUGGESTED ACTION TO COMPEL RAILWAYS TO MOVE WHEAT IN SUFFICIENT QUANTITY TO MEET EXPORT COMMITMENTS

Mr. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct my question to the Minister of Transport. Having regard to the fact that prairie grain farmers have lost more than \$300 million in wheat sales during the current crop year and that the Canadian Wheat Board has now fallen behind by 35 million bushels in committed sales for 1974 because the railways have failed to meet their transport commitment, and the fact that the government has obviously failed in its attempts to persuade the railways to face their obligations, may I ask the minister if the government is now considering action which would compel the railways to move western grain in sufficient quantities to meet export commitments?

Hon. Jean Marchand (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, this is, of course, a subject which I discussed at length with the prairie ministers yesterday and the day before. As you know, we incited the railways to repair a certain number of cars but I do not think that is going to solve the problem. It is one solution, but I think we should have a more permanent one. I know there is another solution which is now before cabinet and I hope a decision will be taken very soon. I have a very close relationship with Canadian National Railways and I saw this morning that they have decided to build I do not know how many thousands new cars in order to discharge their responsibility. This does not mean that we are going to have the cars tomorrow. This is the problem.

An hon. Member: No, it sure does not!

ALLEGED DELIBERATE SABOTAGING OF GRAIN MOVEMENT BY RAILWAYS TO FORCE CHANGE IN CROWNEST FREIGHT RATES

Mr. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that the minister agrees that his solution will not necessarily cure the problem.

May I ask the minister in charge of the Wheat Board whether, in light of the charge made by the President of the National Farmers' Union that the railway companies are deliberately sabotaging grain movement to force a change in the Crownsnest freight rates—I happen to agree the charge is true—he is consulting with his colleague, the Minister of Transport, in regard to this serious charge and are discussions taking place with a view to instituting an immediate inquiry into this very serious charge?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, discussions are, of course, going on between myself and my colleague the Minister of Transport about this very important area. The charge is without any real foundation except in terms of the difficult performance over this past period and we are, of course, looking into that matter. The railways themselves set certain targets which they were unable to meet. The challenge to them now is the additional problem, for them to get back to their targets and to

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co-operate in additional steps to improve performance beyond the original targets in order to make up for the backlog. They know this is the challenge facing them. If they fall short in their efforts to bring about this result we certainly will be taking further steps.

POSSIBILITY OF USING TRUCKS TO MOVE GRAIN FROM INLAND TERMINALS TO PORTS

Mr. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Has the minister in charge of the Wheat Board considered the possibility of employing the trucking industry to move grain from inland terminal positions to the ports with a view to speeding up delivery, and is the government considering the possibility of payment of the charges in excess of the statutory freight rates?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, we have been looking at virtually every possibility. There are, in fact, a limited number of trucks available for the movement of grain in the large commercial quantities that would be required. A great number of these, almost to the fullest extent possible, are being employed in moving grain from country elevators to terminals so that it can be put into unit trains with quick turnaround. We are looking at other means including the possibility of encouraging farmers to haul grain longer distances in their own trucks and whether or not further compensation in that regard would encourage farmers to do so. The Wheat Board has been looking at that and is concerned that it does not have the power to do so or it might have done so already. We are looking at the question of whether we should step in.

EMBARGO AT PORT OF SAINT JOHN—ACTION TO ASSURE GRAIN MOVEMENT

Mr. Tom Bell (Saint John-Lancaster): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Minister of Transport. In view of the very unusual embargo placed on the port of Saint John last night, would the minister check into the entire matter, particularly to see that grain continues to move, since the fire and the strike, the supposed reasons for the embargo, should not affect the movement of grain?

Hon. Jean Marchand (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, this is something I am looking into. I have been looking at it this morning because the position in Saint John is a very serious one and I hope we are going to solve the problem very soon.

SUGGESTED REIMBURSEMENT OF WHEAT BOARD FOR DEMURRAGE CHARGES INCURRED BECAUSE OF SHIPS HAVING TO WAIT FOR GRAIN AT VANCOUVER

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, may I direct a question on the same subject to the minister in charge of the Wheat Board. In view of the shortage of grain in export positions which is causing a serious build-up of ships in Vancouver—22 are loading and waiting and 18 more will arrive in the next week or ten days—and in view of the fact that the delay of ocean vessels will result in demurrage charges being assessed, will the minister say