

in their constituencies in order to save their political hides—to use the words of the Minister of Finance, to reap the transitory political benefit.

Would the minister take this opportunity to say what he has proposed to the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister in support of those auto workers and other manufacturing workers who have been laid off as a result of the budget and as a result of the high interest rate policy of the government, or does he support the high interest rate policy of the government?

Hon. Herb Gray (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce and Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Madam Speaker, I voted for the budget, as did other members on this side of the House.

Miss MacDonald: And high interest rates.

Mr. Gray: The hon. member is so busy trying to develop fictitious rifts on this side of the House—

An hon. Member: Answer the question.

Mr. Gray:—that he overlooks completely the fact that less than two weeks ago I announced a program to provide \$25 million over the next two years to help auto parts companies develop new projects which would bring people back to work and create thousands of new jobs.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: And increased rates.

Mr. Crosbie: So what.

Mr. Gray: I also announced a program involving an expenditure of approximately \$93 million to encourage new production facilities in the area of microelectronics and advanced production machinery and which would also assist all levels of industry, including auto parts manufacturing. It will help them to adopt new production processes in order to become more productive and efficient and maintain existing jobs and create thousands of new jobs. The hon. member is talking while we are acting in a concrete way to deal with the real problems of the economy.

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RAILWAYS

CROWSNEST PASS RATE—PURPOSE OF ESTABLISHMENT AND CONSEQUENCE OF CHANGE

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, at last! I have a question for the Prime Minister. Does the Prime Minister agree that one of the original purposes of the Crow rate was to encourage the establishment and maintenance of rural communities on the prairies and, if so, does he realize that the proposal made by the Minister of Transport in Winnipeg yesterday could have exactly the opposite effect if implemented, namely, the destruction of those communities?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, the Crow rate was established in order to encourage the development of agriculture in the west. Of course included in that is the establishment of a solid economic base for many communities in the west.

There have been some changes in the country over the last 100 years with regard to methods of transportation, methods of production, the size of our markets, the growth rate of communities, urbanization movements, in demographic movements within Canada, and in changes of the age groups.

After this period of time I think it is perfectly reasonable for the government to review something which has existed since the last decade of the nineteenth century, in conjunction with all the interests in the west, and to appoint a westerner, a professor of agriculture and economics in the west, to help bring together the various and sometimes opposing views in the west on how this should be done. That is the position of the government.

PRINCIPLE OF EQUAL RATES FOR EQUAL DISTANCE

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, I now hope the Prime Minister will deal with the question which I asked. I will put it in more precise form.

Despite the opposition of the overwhelming majority of farmers in the prairies to any move that would change the principle of equal rates for equal distance, the Minister of Transport said in his announcement yesterday in Winnipeg that changing this principle is clearly one option that the government is considering. Does the Prime Minister understand that, if this option is acted upon and this principle destroyed, the railway companies will not only have the power but will also have the financial incentive to destroy hundreds of small communities on the prairies? If he agrees with that, will he take steps to ensure that that option is no longer one which this negotiator can consider?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, the Leader of the New Democratic Party insists that the overwhelming majority of people in the west are opposed to the government's initiatives in conjunction with many western groups.

Mr. Broadbent: I am talking about the principle of equal rates for equal distance.

Mr. Trudeau: I do not know where he gets those statistics.

I know that the NDP is opposed to any change, but I have here a list of many organizations which support a change in the Crow rate. There is Unifarm, 63,000 members; Alberta Cattle Commission, 13,000 members; Alberta pool, 55,000 members; United Grain Growers Ltd., 60,000 members—

An hon. Member: Order.

Mr. Clark: Who is in charge, Madam Speaker?

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Order, Madam Speaker.