

Oral Questions

Mr. Hnatyshyn: The negative impact of this proposal put forward by the Minister of Transport today in Winnipeg particularly affects the Saskatchewan farmer. It is a body-blow to the Saskatchewan farmer. The Magna Carta, the statutory Crowsnest rate, has been destroyed. That is unacceptable to the western farmer.

ADEQUACY OF GRAIN TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon West): Madam Speaker, I want to ask the Minister of State for Economic Development this question. The Government has made a statement to the effect that farmers in western Canada should accept this situation on the basis that there will be guarantees of service for grain transportation in western Canada. Where are those guarantees to the farmers of western Canada with respect to the ability of the railways to carry grain to export points?

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (Minister of State for Economic Development and Minister of State for Science and Technology): Madam Speaker, if the Hon. Member has carefully reviewed the material which was distributed to Members of the House this morning and to the press, he will have seen that there will be \$16.5 billion in direct investment in the transportation system. The whole intent of that, of course, is to open up the transportation system, to eliminate the bottlenecks that have existed, and to provide efficient and effective transportation not only for grain, which represents approximately 20 per cent of the volume, but for other commodities which surely are of equal interest to Saskatchewan, such as sulphur and potash and, of course, the coal carriers are affected as well.

The whole purpose of this exercise is to make the transportation system more effective and also to diversify the agricultural base. It is my understanding that Saskatchewan represents approximately 60 per cent of grain shipments. Saskatchewan, with an efficient transportation network to move that grain, will probably see 60 per cent of the increased volume to which I referred a moment ago, which is estimated to rise to 41 million tonnes during the decade. That in itself represents something like \$2 billion additional annual production at today's prices. If the present ratio is maintained, 60 per cent of that will be in the Province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Madam Speaker, what the Minister is saying is that the western grain farmers should buy a pig in a poke from this outfit. I can assure him that they will not accept that.

REQUEST THAT CHANGES BE POSTPONED

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon West): Madam Speaker, I want to put a question to the Minister specifically with respect to the statement made by the Minister in his release in Winnipeg. In an announcement made today the Minister has stated that the Government is committed in principle to generally distance-related freight rates.

Does that mean that the Government is considering a variable rate structure? If not, will the Minister stand in his place and give the House the assurance now that the Government will not permit variable rates?

Finally, in view of the fact that this is going to have serious, negative consequences in western Canada, will the Minister not agree to put the whole proposal out to summer fallow?

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (Minister of State for Economic Development and Minister of State for Science and Technology): Madam Speaker, I must say that I am disappointed at the rhetoric. I wish the Hon. Member would take some time and examine the substance of these proposals.

The proposals which have been put forward will not only have very beneficial impact in terms of the very constituencies that these gentlemen who have been questioning me represent, but they are designed and intended to create long-term, economic development opportunities for the Hon. Member's Province, for western Canada and, in fact, for the country. It is unfortunate that the Question Period today will not permit us the timeframe—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mazankowski: It sure is.

Mr. Johnston:—to expose to Hon. Members the enormous potential that this initiative represents for the country as a whole as well as for the Member's particular Province.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Madam Speaker, I would simply say to the Minister that the proposal put forward by the Minister of Transport is a bureaucratic boondoggle to put the control of western grain production in the hands of the bureaucrats and the Government of the day.

REQUEST THAT MINISTER OF TRANSPORT MAKE STATEMENT ON MOTIONS

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon West): Madam Speaker, I want to ask the Minister if he will not now agree—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Madam Speaker, I can understand why the NDP are so sensitive on this issue. It is because they have been on the back burner on it all along.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Hnatyshyn: I can understand why the Prime Minister smirks in his seat and why the Minister of State for the Wheat Board is hiding in Paris. He did not have the courage to come back to Canada when this was announced.

I want to ask the Minister whether he will give a commitment that at least the Minister of Transport will make a statement on motions in the House, so that we can ask somebody who purports to know something about the issue, some