

Transportation

Mr. Hovdebo:—guarantees something quite different. It guarantees to the railways adequate compensation for the movement of grain. That guarantee to the railways is to be statutory.

Second, it guarantees that the producer will pay more.

An hon. Member: It is a statutory rip-off.

Mr. Hovdebo: The interpretation of the accompanying papers to the announcement indicate that even with some government subsidy, the producer is likely to pay five or six times more than the Crow rate by 1985.

Third, the plan guarantees there will not be a fixed rate for producers. In other words, they cannot be sure what they are going to be charged. The minister has indicated that these three guarantees are non-negotiable. The minister confirmed that just about an hour ago in the House.

Possibly as important to the farmers as what is in this proposal is what is left out. Two fundamental principles of the Crow agreement were left out. First, there is no fixed rate for producers. Second, there is no equal rate for equal distance. There is no non-variable rate.

Mr. Pepin: That is the subject of the Gilson discussion.

Mr. Hovdebo: The minister went on to appoint a negotiator. No doubt he is sincere.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): But there are no public hearings.

Mr. Hovdebo: He has been given instructions to find a consensus in private, in camera. We know that the minister looks on consensus having to do with the Crow as acceptable only if it is in agreement with his position.

We can give significant demonstration of public opinion. For instance, I can suggest that possibly there is no consensus between the whole of the Liberal Party in Saskatchewan and the minister.

An hon. Member: Right on. In the whole west there is no consensus.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): And Ralph Goodale.

Mr. Hovdebo: Some other Liberal parties in other areas have not yet indicated, but I think they are probably likely to take the same position. We have been getting petitions from all parties in Canada, petitions to retain the Crow rate as it is from Quebec, Ontario, Nova Scotia, British Columbia, and all of the prairie provinces. We have thousands of signatures from farmers, asking that the government consider keeping the Crow rate.

Just a couple of weeks ago a television station in Saskatoon asked a question "Should the railways be paid more money to improve grain transportation?" In the course of one hour 173 answered yes and 629 answered no. That is the kind of interest there is in the Crow rate and the kind of support there is for the Crow rate.

The National Farmers Union took a survey in south central Saskatchewan which discovered that 80 per cent of the farmers they contacted were in favour of retention of the Crow rate.

CanWest did a marketing survey for the pools. This survey divulged that 53 per cent were in favour of the status quo, and the question did not even mention the Crow rate. That particular group is also the group which the minister quotes quite often as having done a survey for the CNR. He quotes, but he never produces. I would challenge the minister right now to table that full study carried out by CanWest.

● (1600)

Many of the farm organizations said to be supportive of the Crow need to be canvassed more thoroughly. I am not so sure whether the membership follows the same position as the leadership. At a meeting sponsored by a local of the Manitoba pool on February 22, 300 farmers unanimously passed a resolution as follows:

Therefore be it resolved that the meeting declare that the statutory Crowsnest Pass rates are not bargainable.

Mr. Pepin: I will give you some which says the opposite.

Mr. Hovdebo: That was in Swan River, part of the riding of the hon. member for Dauphin (Mr. Lewycky). I would like to go back to the appointee who is to conduct the hearings on behalf of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin). This man was a member of the task force which produced "Canadian Agriculture in the Seventies", and I will read from that report:

The purpose of effective government action must be to assist the transition from what agriculture is today to what it should be in 1980, which is of course, only a mile post on the journey to 1990 and beyond.

... we must consider the model toward which we are aiming.

They then refer to some trends, which I will read:

- decreasing numbers of farms, farmers, farm labour force and farm population.
- fewer family farms.
- increasing farm size.

Two out of three farmers must go; that is the basic thrust of that report. This from the man who was a member of the task force which recommended the disastrous LIFT plan. Hardly a friend of the farmer.

Apparently, Mr. Speaker, this government does not recognize the economic advantages bestowed by statute as being an obligation they must live up to. The Crow rate is recognized by all as being of some advantage to grain producers. In 1881 the Railway Act bestowed on the CPR the mineral rights to 25 million acres. That statute was of considerable economic advantage to the CPR. If it is considered fair to take away the economic advantage of the Crow rate from the producers of grain, is it not fair to open up the Railway Act of 1881 and take away the tremendous economic advantage given to the CPR by that statute? If it is fair for the farmer, it is fair for the corporation.

Mr. Pepin: You should read the Alberta Wheat Pool publications on the subject. You should read more on the subject.