

Transportation

Now, my final worlds are this. How can we expect trust from farmers when they read who wrote these words? It is all in this book. The man I am talking about is the head of this so-called negotiating team. He did awfully good work for me when I was the minister, yet his name appears in here. How would you like it, Mr. Speaker, if you were a chicken and you were told that a weasel was being put in charge of the hen house? That is all I have to say, thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Deniger (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State (Multiculturalism)): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to be taking part in this very important debate today. After the briefing I had last night and this morning, and on the basis of my experience in the office of the former minister of transport and also as a lawyer for the Railway Transport Committee of the Canadian Transport Commission, I must, first of all, render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and say that the speech by the member for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain (Mr. Hamilton) is indeed typical of those people who do not want the Crowsnest Pass rate to be changed the slightest bit. That is most unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure it is not a matter of a generation gap between myself and the hon. member who spoke before me. I certainly do not think so. But first, if I may, I shall quote from a speech made by the Premier of Alberta, the Hon. Peter Lougheed, in the Alberta legislature on October 14, 1981:

In our view, the entire question of the Crowsnest Pass rate should now be given a priority in decision-making in Canada instead of being left to gather dust.

That is what the Premier of Alberta said, also the provincial premier of the member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski). I therefore fail to understand, Mr. Speaker, why the former minister of transport is criticizing us for taking action. It seems obvious to me that if the hon. member has had a chance to stay on as minister of transport, he would have taken action. And if he has to blame someone, I think he should be blaming his leader, the former prime minister, who brought about the election that put him out of a job, Mr. Speaker. Westerners know all about the Crowsnest Pass. For most wheat producers, it is like an insurance policy, but easterners, and perhaps Quebecers even more so, are certainly not all very familiar with my version of the history of the Crowsnest Pass.

We have heard the New Democratic Party's version, and we have heard that of the Progressive Conservative Party, and now I should like to have an opportunity to give Quebecers and all Canadians who are listening to me today, my version of the Crowsnest Pass agreement concluded by the government and Canadian Pacific in September 1897. The agreement provided that the government would subsidize the construction of 300 miles of track between Lethbridge and southern British Columbia, through the Crowsnest Pass, if the railway company promised to apply reduced freight rates. That was the deal, Mr. Speaker. In 1925, the agreement became an integral part of legislation applying to all railway companies operating

in the Prairies. I shall digress, if I may, and examine some of the statements by the member for Vegreville, who was saying earlier in his speech that this should have been referred to the Standing Committee on Transport.

I myself am a member of the Standing Committee on Transport. As a politician, of course I want everything to be considered in the transport committee, but at the appropriate time, which is when an amendment to legislation is proposed. I feel that at this stage, it would have been premature to refer to the transport committee a decision that has yet to be made. Regarding our domestic air policy, to which the member for Vegreville alluded, not legislation but policy is being amended, and I want to congratulate the minister for deeming this the appropriate time for referring the policy to our committee. The situation is therefore as follows: In 1926, the Crow was part of the Railway Act. So what has happened since that time? Well, today, the agreement applies to 16,500 miles of railway lines, and not 2,915 as was the case in 1926. There are 1,245 delivery points and not 289, and the agreement applies to exports carried to Vancouver, Prince Rupert, Churchill, Armstrong and Thunder Bay instead of Thunder Bay alone. Clearly, and the member for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain was absolutely right, it was a very effective instrument of national policy, until the fifties when, unfortunately, inflation caught up with the freight rates. Thus, the artificially low rates for the transport of wheat, as provided under the 1897 Act which was renewed in 1926, have had major consequences for the west today. It is as clear as the nose on your face. First of all, grain processing did not develop in the production area, for very obvious reasons. Second, though grain was produced in the west, other industries in this area, such as animal production, which is carried out in an area dear to the heart of the member for Medicine Hat (Mr. Hargrave), were unable to reap the same benefit. Third, low freight rates for six types of unprocessed grain—note that these were designated—did not encourage grain growers to diversify.

Obviously, if only six types of grain are going to benefit from this rate, it does not pay for farmers to grow other kinds, so they do not. So what is the end result? Well, perhaps it takes an easterner or a French Canadian to notice the obvious, namely, that the Crow has distorted the economy of western Canada and nipped in the bud what would have been a sensible urge to diversify. The development of eastern Canada and Quebec is closely linked to its many ports, and the development of western Canada has depended on its railway network. The west, which has already become the growth centre of Canada today, will grow if it has an effective railway network, and it is clear that if there is no immediate increase in the number of railway lines in western Canada, that growth is in jeopardy. It will stagnate. Now we must clear up, once and for all, the problem of who is going to pay the piper. The railways