

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I was speaking in a general way and focused upon the questions of transportation and water supply as important elements in the future development of the western economy. At the present time detailed work is being done within the government as to the best way in which we can respond to the requirements of the transportation system in the west and the water supply problems. When that detailed work is completed, it will be possible to give the hon. member the kind of information he obviously wants today.

Mr. Crosbie: Double-tonguing.

Mr. Hargrave: Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the same minister. With respect to the same reference to insufficient water supplies, I should like to ask the minister whether this is a reference to a much needed long-range contingency drought policy which the west is dearly in need of these days. Even though that high profile agency, the PFRA, is working on this, they need much more incentive. Could it refer to that, or possibly could it refer to the challenge of interbasin water transfers from rivers in northern Canada to southern Canada, in the west?

Mr. MacEachen: I thank the hon. member for giving me more detail on his concerns. Obviously it would be difficult to consider water supply programs in the west without concentrating at the same time on the question of drought and its incidence in the west, and both these areas will be addressed in our studies.

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● (1450)

RAILWAYS

CROWSNEST PASS RATE—HALL REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Vic Althouse (Humboldt-Lake Centre): Madam Speaker, I would like to address my question to the Prime Minister, and it concerns recent statements regarding farmers' support of the Crow rate. Since the vast majority of farmers agree with the solution to the Crow rate which was offered by Chief Justice Emmett Hall in his report on grain handling and transportation, whereby the statutory rate paid by the farmer remains, and the government negotiates with the railways to determine the balance of any revenue required in return for service, is the Prime Minister talking about the same Hall recommendations when he talks about doing what the farmers want on the Crow rate?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): I wish I had the illusory self-assurance of the hon. member when he says that he knows what the western farmers want. I met—

An hon. Member: Voting for the Constitution.

Mr. Trudeau: Well, I understand.

An hon. Member: I wouldn't take his word very much at all.

Oral Questions

Mr. Trudeau: I met with a group, just a couple of weeks ago, the Western Agricultural Conference, and they were presenting a different type of argument. As I have said in the House before, our purpose is to find out, first, if collectively the farmers and related industries in the west want a change in the Crow rate; second, if they do, can they agree on what a change could be? I do not believe the hon. member has a clear authority to say what they want out there, because, as he knows, the government of Saskatchewan is in disagreement with the governments of Manitoba and Alberta on this particular matter.

Mr. Althouse: I realize that some of the provincial governments are in disarray over this issue, but the Prime Minister was talking, in his—

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Sleep.

Mr. Althouse:—replies on the radio programs out in the west, to farmer majority opinion. Chief Justice Hall, in his survey years ago, established what that farmer majority opinion was. If that report is no longer valid, then what absolute end of the line reassurance or absolute authority does the Prime Minister intend to accept, if his own royal commission report was not good enough?

Mr. Trudeau: I am not suggesting that the report is not valid. I am saying that we are hearing different views on that from different groups in the west, and I made it clear that the government would like to settle this matter in a way which could achieve the greatest possible consensus in the west.

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ESTIMATES

PROCEDURE RESPECTING RELEASE OF MAIN ESTIMATES

Mr. Bruce Lonsdale (Timiskaming): Madam Speaker, my question is for the President of the Privy Council. With regard to the circumstances that occurred yesterday concerning the tabling of the main estimates for 1981-82—

Some hon. Members: Order, order.

Mr. Lonsdale:—as you know, there was an obvious attempt to filibuster, and the opposition knowingly set out purposely to prevent the tabling of those documents. It is difficult to understand how the opposition can knowingly set about to do anything on purpose. However, I would like to ask the President of the Privy Council, in view of the circumstances yesterday, what he is planning to do in terms of reviewing the lock-up procedures, and whether he feels that the opposition's irresponsible attitude yesterday will jeopardize the normal and traditional procedure of advance notice and access to information by the press.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!