

Oral Questions

member studies it, he will realize that it is a pretty fair program.

REQUEST THAT MINISTER OFFER TO RESIGN ON ISSUE

Hon. Alvin Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): Madam Speaker, I would like to continue this questioning with the Minister of Agriculture. I introduce my question by saying that this morning the Prime Minister announced a pretty wide-ranging power to ministers to disagree with cabinet colleagues without being kicked out of the government. In view of that, will the minister take a hard look at the statement made by the Minister of Transport today in Winnipeg and accept my word, and I am sure the word of any person who looks at it objectively, that the Minister of Transport's statement this morning is a complete betrayal of the recommendations of the Hall commission report? Whether he likes it or not, and no matter how many farmers he may talk to, it is the Magna Carta of western Canada, and he should not forget that.

Second, the statement by the minister betrays what this Parliament decreed in the National Transportation Act of 1967.

● (1440)

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I am sorry that the hon. member must be called back to order, but he is really making a speech and not asking a question.

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): Madam Speaker, I apologize to the House for taking longer than my usual 20 seconds. However, as the minister knows, this is a very important matter.

Would the minister accept my question with all fairness and honesty and consider what he has just said in answer to the hon. member for Moose Jaw, because the farmers have only one person to look to, and that is the Minister of Agriculture. They do not trust any other western minister. Would the minister stand and say that he will consider this again, that if this is a betrayal, as the conclusion will be, he is willing to offer his resignation as a sign of championship on the part of the farmers of Canada?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, I have been involved in practically every discussion we have had in government, and many discussions outside of government, about the Crowsnest Pass rates. I do not feel that it is a betrayal when one studies the complete program. I do not feel it is a betrayal when one studies the need for the diversification of agriculture in the west, the things needed to encourage that kind of processing to take place in the west, the kind of development that is needed in the west, and the kind of improvement needed for the railroads.

I cannot accept what the hon. member has said—at one stage, maybe several years ago, it might have been a betrayal, but I think that it would be a betrayal not to do anything

about the Crowsnest Pass rate, to accept and go along with the old program, the old agreement of 1897 and not move ahead. If we did all things like that in our country we would not be the envy of the world for our agricultural industry.

I say that we have to move ahead with this program. I have said that from the very beginning in all the discussions in which we have been involved. It will be a fair program. It must be that kind so that our grain producers are not put at a disadvantage with any other grain producers in any part of the world with whom we are competing. I am satisfied that this program is that.

HALL COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION TO ESTABLISH PRAIRIE RAIL AUTHORITY

Hon. Alvin Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): Madam Speaker, the minister has made a direct challenge to me on this point, and I am going to put it right to him. Will he recommend to the government that the recommendation of the Hall commission be accepted, that there be a prairie rail authority set up by the federal government—this is a federal issue, not a provincial issue—to take over those 2,000 miles of lines on which there are losses, run them by the federal government through this authority and show the railways how to make money out of them?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, of course, the intent is that all parts of our society, whether they be railways, farmers, business people or miners, make money. That is the idea. Profit is not a bad word in our party as far as we are concerned.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Whelan: We want the railways to make a profit. I am willing to wait for the negotiator to finish his discussions and bring back the recommendations to us on what he thinks should be done. He will hold discussions across the prairies. The negotiations will take place with this person, whom, I am sure, the hon. member also knows and highly respects. He will be the main person involved in the negotiations. I am willing to wait, because we want it as quick as we can. I wanted those rates adjusted last year but we were not successful in getting it before the people early enough. So, we had further and longer discussions to make sure more people understood what we were trying to do, and also to make sure that we understood what more people wanted us to do. I think we are making that kind of proposition now. The negotiator will tell us better later.

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[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

INQUIRY WHETHER MEASURES TO STIMULATE HOUSING CONSTRUCTION AND CREATE JOBS WILL BE PROPOSED

Mr. Jacques Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Right Hon. Prime Minister, and