

The Address—Mr. Lang

have been a series of meetings regularly at the ministerial level, led by my colleague, the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand). Something in the order of 160 references of specific rate problems or discriminations have been made to the Canadian Transportation Commission for review. I have indicated that, as the Minister of Justice, I will be prepared to intervene on behalf of the government in rate cases where that is necessary in order to assist individuals in obtaining justice in respect of claims they may have. There will be further cost disclosures, so much desired by provincial governments. The federal government has decided to move toward more adequate disclosures of the facts and background so that the true case of freight rates can be known.

We have made a good beginning in this work, but the work must be pressed on. It is our purpose to press ahead with steps in many directions in respect of transportation and, indeed in the handling of our grain. The hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner) talked about our problems in handling grain. Of course, he neglected to note the fact that with the steps we have taken in the past years regarding the block system, coordinators at the terminals, with additional hopper cars and an attempt to turn around trains as rapidly as possible, with the existing system we have in three successive years set three successive records in the volume of grain moved. For three years in a row we have moved more grain out of the prairie region into export and domestic markets than was available from production in any of those particular years. In each of those three years our disposition of grain exceeded the actual production of grain, and this was done with the transportation system we now have.

In this year, with all the difficulties again which have beset us, we likely once again will move and dispose of more grain from the prairie region than was grown in the last year of production. That is what is happening with the transportation system we have. But we are not satisfied and we will be taking additional steps to go on beyond that. We will not be taking them in a way which attempts to seek only political advantage from a particular situation in a particular location, trying to run in all directions at once as the hon. member for Crowfoot always does so marvellously.

In connection with the subject of agriculture, the throne speech bears the clear imprint of the Western Economic Opportunities Conference. My colleague, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan), dealt thoroughly with this area in his remarks to the House earlier this week. The activities planned by this government in connection with agriculture comprises a list that is impressive and extremely important, and shows our determination to improve the lot of the farmer, the great producer in this country, and to improve also the situation of the consumer by giving him security of supply. This can only come about in the long run if there is a fair and decent return for our farmers who will produce the food for the consumer. May I call it one o'clock.

At one o'clock the House took recess.

[Mr. Lang.]

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, just before the adjournment I had indicated that my colleague the Minister of Agriculture had reviewed a good number of measures which are proposed in the Speech from the Throne to deal with particular problems of agriculture and food production in Canada. I do not want to go into the details of this list or of these actions again. However, I do want to refer to one of them in particular. I should like to deal with the general approach of the government and with its intentions in regard to stabilization in the area of agricultural production.

● (1410)

We have proposals to put before the House in connection with stabilization of animal production as it relates to the production of meat. We intend also to bring back before the House the proposal in regard to stabilizing income for grain farmers to offset the vagaries which can occur because of the ups and downs that are almost inevitable in an export oriented grain market. Hon. members will, of course, appreciate that this is an old friend, one which could have been in place now, to provide protection for farmers in the grain producing region of the country, to protect producers against downturns in income, but it was blocked by a variety of tactics adopted by the opposition in a previous parliament. Now, we propose to come back and give the opposition parties a chance to repent, and to see this important form of protection for farmers put in place.

In the days when it was first introduced, members of the opposition tended to cry that it was stabilization of poverty, although as a matter of fact it was intended as a level of protection related to the returns to farmers over a period of time. This measure was designed to put cash in their hands if income took a significant down turn because of prices or, more likely, because of changes in volume of crops in the rest of the world were especially good when compared with the average year, or especially when compared with a bad year. The current level of grain income in 1973 and 1974 flowing into the prairie region shows how silly was the cry respecting stabilization of poverty at that time, and makes it perfectly clear to everyone why a program such as we propose would be a significant element in the days ahead.

We propose, in coming back to the plan, to introduce a voluntary feature, so that if any farmer finds he does not want to be a part of the program he will have an opportunity to opt out of it, although I certainly hope that all hon. members in all parties will bring the advantages of such a program to the attention of individual farmers so that this option is not widely used by those who, in the long run, would find it hurt them to get out of the plan. We have been working on the program as it was designed to be passed into law in 1971, and there will be some specific detailed alterations in it as a result of that work.

The work on stabilization, Mr. Speaker, the work on grain generally, from the purchase of hopper cars with money spent on behalf of the people of Canada, the move toward two-price wheat, work on the LIFT program, and