

Oral Questions

[English]

RAILWAYS

CROWSNEST PASS RATE—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Doug Anguish (The Battlefords-Meadow Lake): Madam Speaker, it has always been a position of the federal New Democratic Party to support the Crow rate. My question is to the Minister of Transport. I understand that at a recent meeting of the Manitoba Wheat Pool Elevators he announced that a bill will be coming before Parliament shortly to change the Crow rate. In light of the statement the Prime Minister made earlier this year in the House that there would be no change in the Crow rate until there was consensus in western Canada, and now that the province of Saskatchewan and also the province of Manitoba support retention of the Crow rate, what is the government's position with regard to the Crow rate at this time?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, I answered a question on the same subject last week at which time I indicated that, following the budget which assigns \$1.3 billion to western transportation, the government was going to decide on which way to spend it. I said the other day that there were two broad possible approaches. One was a comprehensive approach which would include the Crow rate modernization, and the other was a special project approach. This debate is before cabinet now and I will advise my hon. friend when a decision is made.

REGINA RALLY IN SUPPORT OF RATE RETENTION

Mr. Doug Anguish (The Battlefords-Meadow Lake): Madam Speaker, I understand that there is a rally in Regina today in support of the Crow rate. The minister in charge of the Wheat Board, who has been a great advocate of retention of the Crow rate, was supposed to have been addressing that rally in Regina at this very hour. From a phone call to his office I have found out that he is not at that meeting in Regina but is in his office in Ottawa. I would ask the minister, if he has not already made a decision on the Crow rate and if he does not have his tail tucked between his legs here in Ottawa, eating Crow, when that decision will be made.

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, both the Minister of State responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and myself are due to address the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool in the coming days. I think he does so tomorrow and I do so on Thursday. Both of us will have ample opportunity to express our views on that subject at this time.

But there is one thing about which both of us agree enthusiastically and strongly, and that is that measures have to be taken now to make sure that western Canada will have the best possible transportation system. That means enhancing very substantially the main line capacity of that railway system. That will be done.

[Translation]

THE CONSTITUTION

REQUEST THAT RESOLUTION CONSIDERED IN QUEBEC NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BE CONSIDERED AT CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE

Mr. Gilles Marceau (Jonquière): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Justice, whom I wish to congratulate on the agreement reached on equality of women and aboriginal rights. Starting today and during the next few days, the Quebec National Assembly will be debating an important resolution containing basic principles for the future of Canada, that is, the principle of Canadian duality and special status for Quebec. Although he is not now considering this resolution, is the minister prepared to give the House the assurance that the constitutional process will not end once the resolution has been passed here in Ottawa, and second, that the contents and the basic principles of this resolution will be discussed at a future constitutional conference?

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Social Development): Madam Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that the constitutional process will not end after the vote to be held shortly on the resolution. This is the first stage in developing a new constitution for Canadians. There will be other conferences. In fact, one is to be held some time during the next few months, in order to discuss, with the provinces, how yesterday's agreement on aboriginal rights is to be implemented. There will be further stages in the discussion on the Constitution and obviously, if the Government of Quebec wishes to continue the debate in order to amend more specifically the three elements with which it cannot agree at this time, we are always prepared to discuss these issues. I regret it has not been possible to have discussions on this matter during the last two or three weeks, because according to my information at this time, the provinces would have been prepared to consider various amendments that might have been satisfactory to the government of Quebec. But in any case, I can give the hon. member the assurance that we are prepared to make changes later, since then we will finally have the Constitution here in Canada, with a mechanism for amending the Constitution in Canada, without going through the British Parliament. Therefore if the government of the province of Quebec does not make a decision within the next few days, the door will still be open and attempts to improve the situation can still be made. I am sure that the other provinces will be willing to consider any reasonable proposals.