

The Assistant Deputy Chairman: Is the hon. member for Mackenzie rising on a point of order?

Mr. Korchinski: No, Mr. Chairman, I just want you to repeat that. I do not have it at this particular time.

The Assistant Deputy Chairman: I will repeat, we are now on Vote 1a, the Finance Department. We are proceeding now to Vote 5a—that is finished. Now, we are going on to item 30a, Industry, Trade and Commerce.

Some hon. Members: Carried.

Mr. Knight: No.

The Assistant Deputy Chairman: The hon. member for Assiniboia.

Mr. Knight: I hope, Mr. Chairman, that we have now hit the estimates related to the funding of the building of hopper cars, an amount in the neighbourhood of some \$48 million less \$7,700,000. This issue arose last spring as a result of the impending general election when the minister, hopeful of gaining some support in the west, decided that he ought to go out with a program to build some 2,000 hopper cars to carry grain. It was suggested, sometimes by farm organizations and sometimes by members, that although the need for rolling stock to keep the grain moving to market was realized, it was opportunistic of the federal government to buy the rolling stock and supply it to the railroads when it was the duty of the railroads, under the Railway Act, to supply the rolling stock.

If this gesture were followed further, the government could move into the business of supplying hopper cars to move potash out of Saskatchewan or lumber chips from the northern part of British Columbia or to move goods anywhere in Canada. We could get into the business of supplying the railways with rolling stock. With \$48 million, we bought 2,000 hopper cars to roll on the tracks in western Canada. The question that arises now is how long will the government pursue the policy of having the people of Canada serve the railways? When will the railroads be put in the position of serving the people of Canada? That is the fundamental question. The minister can have the grain councils and his other representatives, but the fundamental thing is that when he goes out of his way to buy 2,000 hopper cars and supply them to the railroads, the government is failing to make the railroads live up to their responsibilities. They must serve the farmers of the west, whether in the riding of Assiniboia, Regina-Lake Centre or Saskatoon-Humboldt. It was learned that in those parts of the west where the 2,000 hopper cars are to operate, 50 per cent of the track will not carry them. They cannot be used. What a reflection that is on the railway system of this country. Fifty per cent of track in western Canada cannot be used. I suggest that in Saskatchewan the figure is a great deal higher. In that province, it will be difficult to use hopper cars for the carrying of grain.

• (1450)

The other night we heard the minister in charge of the Wheat Board and the hon. member for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain arguing about policy. It was an excellent debate, each member being right about the policies of the

Supply

other. What has happened with respect to hopper cars is a prime example of what hon. members were talking about. The central government has developed a special relationship with the railroads. When they run into trouble, the government bails them out, mostly with grants of money. When the minister in charge of the Wheat Board was asked what he would do about the question of hopper cars, he suggested he would leave the matter in the hands of the railroads.

There is no clearcut agreement between the Canadian Wheat Board and the railroads with regard to paying for the cost of operation of those 2,000 hopper cars. There is no kind of maintenance agreement and we do not really know who will pay for the maintenance. I suspect we shall learn, when we get all the facts, that the Canadian Wheat Board and therefore the farmers of western Canada, will pay for the cost of operating those 2,000 hopper cars. It doesn't matter whether the Grits or the Tories are in charge of the railways of this country, whether the hon. member for Vegreville is the minister of transport, or the present minister, whose constituency I forget. It would not make a tinker's damn of difference, as there is no agreement. Oh yes, there was an initial agreement to allow the railroads to use the cars. That makes sense. When you buy 2,000 hopper cars and present them to the railroads, it makes sense to use them. The railroads are using them. Who knows how much the railroads are making out of the business. Who knows what the Wheat Board will have to pay and, therefore, indirectly the western producer.

When it was pointed out that 50 per cent of the track in western Canada cannot carry the hopper cars, the minister said we will tell the railroads that they must improve those lines in order to use the hopper cars. The minister knows as well as I do that the state of the track gives the railroads a perfectly legitimate excuse to do what they intend to do in 1975, namely, abandon certain rail lines. They intend to abandon them and say that certain railway lines are not up to par and cannot be used for moving grain. This merely presents the railroads with a good excuse for abandoning lines. In Assiniboia constituency there are 1,170 miles of track. Of that total, 605 miles, used for carrying 22.5 million bushels of wheat will be abandoned by 1975 unless the government proposes an alternative policy. Mr. Chairman, in 1975 the moratorium on rail line abandonment in western Canada will be lifted by the Canadian Transport Commission.

During the election campaign, the former minister of finance was made the head of the Canadian Transport Commission. That really cheered us up in western Canada. The Conservatives, during the election campaign, wanted the head of the Canadian Transport Commission to be fired. That is a good idea, but it really does not matter because if the Tories were in power they would, after firing the present chairman of the Canadian Transport Commission, instal in his place the president of the CPR; there would be no difference in policy. So, in 1975 some of the recommendations of the McPherson Commission, which was set up by the Tory government, will be carried out either by a Grit government or a Tory government, unless we once again operate in a House of minorities. Barring that possibility, 605 miles of track in Assiniboia will be abandoned. The elevator capacity on