

Transportation Policies

and praised. Certainly those most concerned with ports have welcomed this move. They have been intimately associated with the developments taking place, and I think they will welcome the legislation which I hope will soon be introduced in this House. That broad principle of minimizing bureaucracy and decentralizing operations is being put forward very generally in our programs.

Hon. members spoke about transportation without mentioning many of the recent developments. WEOC was mentioned. I ask hon. members to remember WEOC and the claims for cost disclosure. This government has introduced cost disclosure legislation and, day by day or week by week, has been providing the provinces with the information they wanted about costs. This has laid to rest a good number of myths about a lot of cost matter where there was a fear that too many of the freight rates were ignoring costs and reality.

Bill C-33 which is before the House is likely to be delayed, because in addition to the many hours it has already taken on second reading I am told that many more will be required and so it may not be possible to get it through in this session. Some of the most important principles in that bill are the introduction of the western economic opportunities reply to the question of whether long-haul rates should be lower than short-haul rates, and the very important issue of whether some limits should be put on freight rates in a more realistic way than was done in 1967.

The railways do not like the maximum limits that would be imposed by Bill C-33 because they recognize that even those limits, which at the very beginning are fairly modest restraints, will cause the lowering of certain rail freight rates, particularly on those products where the railways say they are charging what the product can easily bear but which really means they are over-charging when the market can bear it. That is what Bill C-33 is meant to alter and if I had the co-operation of hon. members opposite we could move ahead rapidly in that regard.

I mentioned the Hall Report earlier. I could also mention the Snavely Report which dealt with the analysis of the cost of moving grain and indicated the problem of that cost being a great deal higher than the long established and often called sacred Crowsnest rate on grain.

That of course leads to a natural reference to the government proposition contained in the 1975 paper which Mr. Hall has endorsed and which provides if that rate is being prescribed which is below cost—and as a matter of policy that is being prescribed—then the government ought to pay the difference between that rate and the real cost. Certainly I have indicated desire to see that the railways have the required funds, following along the lines of the Hall recommendation, to get on with the upgrading of the rail branch lines which in the prairies is so badly needed. In the Regina meeting on May 28 I indicated that such was my intention.

Both the Hall and the Snavely reports deal with the important area of grain on the prairie provinces. Hon. members opposite did not mention the many other things that are being done to make that system work better. There is the purchase of 8,000 hopper cars which western members frequently refuse to

[Mr. Lang.]

talk about because, if they did, they would have to praise the government; nor do they stop their colleagues from other parts of the country from sounding critical because the government spends that kind of money on a western problem. This is a sign of the disunity in the policies of that party, and it spreads disunity, and suspicion, and resentment across this country.

The Conservative party is guilty of preaching disunity and preaching different views in different parts of the country at all times.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. The hon. Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) has the floor and all other hon. members will have their chance to speak. I am prepared to stay here until ten o'clock if necessary.

Mr. Lang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That should just about give me time to go through the list of things that the government has done and to detail them adequately for the edification of hon. members opposite. I was going to mention a few other things in relation to the Hall and Snavely recommendations in regard to the grain handling system on the prairies.

I might mention that we were able to achieve an agreement between the two railways that would eliminate back hauls, which for a long time have been the subject of criticism. That was mentioned at the Western Economic Opportunities Conference. I welcome the suggestion of the hon. member for Edmonton Centre (Mr. Paproski) that we are about ready for another conference of that sort. Certainly it would be a good thing to review matters and remind the west of how much has been done. He and his colleagues are so numerous in their negativisms that they often mislead people in the west about how much has been accomplished. Another conference would probably be a very good idea.

Mr. Paproski: It is about time to do it because the next election is coming up.

Mr. Lang: When the boxcars of the railways were falling into disrepair we introduced a special repair program for them, and we developed a new quota system which was attacked by both opposition parties as being destructive of old values. It is now recognized in the west as being absolutely necessary for the effective movement of grain as fast as the Wheat Board needs it. The block shipping system was a marvelous addition to the usefulness of our railway equipment by reducing turn around times.

We have the Manz Report on how cars should be allocated for grain. We have the trucking program which the Canadian Wheat Board was able to institute at our cost in order to ensure that damp grain could be dried. In every area we have been moving rapidly to improve our transportation system.

These are things which have been done from one end of the country to the other, and much of it has been done through agreement with the provinces of disparate political beliefs.