

Grain Transportation

impossible. There is enormous potential for dislocation if some rolling stock is suddenly redirected. While the particular grain transport need might be satisfied, there would, in all likelihood, be delays in other traffic. I would like to hear the reaction the member for Regina West gets when he makes this sort of proposal to the coal, sulphur, or potash producers. These products are equally important to the west.

I will put all partisanship aside and say that when the Tories were in power, they had the right approach to problems of grain movement. They realize, as does this government, that because railways were losing money on the movement of grain, they were not able to invest in the grain transportation system as much as was needed. I suppose the member for Regina West realized that too. After all, he wrote a letter to *The Globe and Mail* which was published on February 26, which reads:

An overwhelming majority of western farmers agree that the railways should be compensated for their losses.

But until this takes place—and we hope it will be soon—the solution is not to bully the system through a piece of legislation into doing something of which it is not capable. The solution is co-operation and co-ordination of efforts. The Wheat Board, the grain commission, the grain companies and pools, the producers, and the CTC all have an interest with the railways in moving the grain. This is why the Tories appointed the grain transportation co-ordinator. We think the office has done a good job and that the spirit of co-operation is there.

● (1640)

The best example of what this has achieved is our record export performance last year, which was up 20 per cent from the previous year. This year, unloads at terminals are running 4 per cent to 5 per cent ahead of last year. In fact, the terminal elevators are brimming over and waiting for ships. This sort of picture does not seem to call for Draconian legislation which would upset the distribution of responsibilities between the different parties involved in the system.

Last November there were complaints about country elevators in southern Alberta being clogged. No doubt this is the sort of situation which this bill is expected to address. But would it? As amended, Section 266 would obviously apply, and the Wheat Board would have to decide whether to order the railway, in this case the CPR, to provide equipment. If the CPR did provide the equipment instantly, would that have done any good? The problem, as it turns out, was a labour dispute in Revelstoke to the west, which was affecting not only grain but all commodities. It was not a lack of willingness or any sort of corporate blackmail on the part of the CPR.

In the end, each party acted rationally. The Wheat Board, seeing that the grain was not moving, restricted the delivery quota. It would not have made sense to make farmers drive to a full elevator only to turn back without leaving their load. As an interim measure, the CPR managed to move a considerable amount of the grain east to Thunder Bay until the labour dispute was resolved.

I would venture to say that most problems can be tackled this way, by understanding the situation and capitalizing on the opportunities. Applying a heavy-handed legislative club would not have solved the Revelstoke problem, nor would it solve other similar cases.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, the difficulties which were experienced some years ago, which caused us to lose potential grain exports, have been overcome for the time being. They were not overcome by legislating the operations of the railways; they were overcome by financial assistance by governments but, even more important, by a co-operative attitude and a will to make the system work.

The job is far from finished, if we are to meet the grain export targets we have set for ourselves. But it is the positive and rational attitude which must prevail. I do not think that this bill is a contribution in that direction.

Mr. Jim Peterson (Willowdale): Mr. Speaker, I rise with great pleasure to speak on this bill, which involves a subject that is important not only to the western wheat farmer, as the hon. member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor) has acknowledged, and important not only to the economy of the whole of western Canada, but to the very heart of the economy. That is to say, our agricultural base—our oldest economic base in Canada. This is the reason so many people came from other countries to Canada.

Wheat has been one of our greatest exports. Our fundamental and economic existence would be something vastly different from what we presently find it to be if we did not have a prosperous agricultural community based in western Canada. Therefore, I do not think any of us should underestimate the importance of the subject which we find before us. I say this humbly as one from the east who knows how much all Canadians have benefited from the strength of western agriculture in our country.

The approach we are being asked to adopt by the hon. member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin) is to take power from the Canada Transport Commission and give it to another regulatory body, the grain commission. I am not sure if this type of meddling through giving the power from one agency to the other will be the solution. I am not even convinced that the member for Bow River, who spoke in support of the bill, is sure that it will be the solution. His comments were to the effect that we should at least refer it to the committee so that we can discuss it further. I think that is a fair representation of what he said. I really do not think that is good enough. We, as responsible legislators and Members of Parliament, have the obligation to come up with reasonable and workable solutions before we can ask other members in this House, as representatives of their constituents, to begin to come to grips with fundamental problems.

All of us are concerned that the maximum amount of grain be transported to and from our ports. This has been a concern of the hon. member for Regina West for a number of years. For example, in 1979 he made an application to the CTC to try to have Section 262 apply in respect of the handling of