

Western Grain Transportation Act

be strikes, or there is no guarantee that the producer can deliver the grain.

An Hon. Member: If there is grain to move.

Mr. Korchinski: My colleague suggests that the farmer might not be in a position to have grain to move, and that is true. I have been getting calls from people in my constituency and they tell me that in many areas grain is not moving because it is frozen. There is no demand for it. So it does not matter how efficient the railway system is, if there are no customers grain will not be moved.

While I am on the subject of frozen grain, I hear a lot of comment to the effect that farmers will diversify. Commodity groups tell us that they will diversify. I represent an area that has diversified, Mr. Speaker. When I was campaigning for election in 1957 there were mountains of grain in my constituency and farmers did not know what to do with it. The Liberal Government could not cope with the problem. It was not that there were not enough boxcars or railway lines in those pre-abandonment days; we simply did not have the customers.

When the Conservative Government took over, one of the things it said it was going to do was diversify and cut into the mountains of grain. We set up community pastures in many areas, using sub-marginal lands. We used up a lot of that grain. We also entered into contracts later with Mainland China. We were chastised for taking that action, but we did move the grain. We knew it was necessary. We also ended up with a lot of cattle and we fed them a lot of that grain. The cattle population increased by leaps and bounds. Saskatchewan had a cattle population of 1.3 million. Because cattle prices went down, it later dropped to something like 600,000 or 700,000.

• (1530)

Why did these people not stay in the cattle business? They had frozen grain and it was cheap. The simple reason was that there was no money in that business. To suggest that somehow there is going to be a transformation and a lot of wonderful things are going to happen to western Canada is somewhat deceiving, as we know because we have travelled that route before. Had we not, then I would say: yes, perhaps there is some measure of truth to the comments made. But I have to tell my people that I do not believe that what the Government is saying will happen. I see too many closed feed lots. I get calls from people who have frozen grain. I know it can be sold, and these farmers would like to dispose of it at lower prices. When interest rates were as high as 23 per cent, they were willing to dispose of it even at a reduced price so they could save money on interest rates. But there were no takers for the simple reason that there was no profit in the cattle business.

Now, I am told also that there will be a lot of diversification. Well, I happen to come from and represent a very good farming district. That district has diversified. We grow wheat, oats, barley, rye, flax seed, rape, canola, bird seed, you name

it. We have diversified. We have done everything. Alfalfa, sweet clover—

Mr. Gustafson: Sunflowers.

Mr. Korchinski: Sunflowers are not in my area, thank you. But in the southern part I know they grow sunflowers. So we have done everything possible to diversify, but we do not have the extra markets. We have tried it. The south Saskatchewan River dam was built with the idea that there were going to be market gardens in that area. There are forage crops, irrigation, but not very much else. The water is there. We had high hopes for the area, but it did not quite materialize the way we had hoped. So for anyone to suggest that somehow there is going to be a magic transformation in western Canada is, to say the least, deceptive. What we will have is a bigger bill to pay for transportation.

I can understand the commodity groups, for example, the potash producers, or sulphur or chemical producers, or for that matter the cattle producers, wanting cheaper grain. After all, they know they cannot make money at the present time. Of course, there was all kinds of pressure. It was interesting that the Minister introduced his Bill in French. Obviously this was intended for another part of the country, to reassure them that nothing would happen. Although we are told in western Canada that we will have diversification and our cattle population is going to grow, obviously there was an assurance going out there that things were going to be just fine. Although this Bill will affect western Canada particularly, it was not until the pressure from the Quebec caucus was applied to the Minister that changes were brought about. Why is it necessary to have pressure from another part of Canada so that wheat farmers can be heard? Why? The Minister might say, well, perhaps the Conservative caucus is not exactly united on this issue. Well, it just so happens that the Conservative caucus is full of Members from rural Canada. We represent different interests. I would expect every Member to stand up and defend his own particular constituency and represent it adequately.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Korchinski: If a Member comes from a cattle producing area, I would expect him to say, yes, I do represent that area. I well know the situation in Alberta and Manitoba is different from Saskatchewan, and I expect every one of those Members to do a good job of representing his constituents. It so happens that the Liberal caucus has western representatives from the cities. I do not know, maybe they represent the dog and cat population out there, or whatever. But they have no idea what it is like, and neither does the NDP.

Mr. Tessier: Say your message in French.

Mr. Korchinski: I see in the Bill reference to variable rates. Well, they will be the most damaging to the area which I represent, that is, the northern part of Saskatchewan. We have the greatest distance from our area to the West Coast or the East Coast. The Minister came out with an assurance that he would put the Port of Churchill to maximum use.