

Adjournment Debate

Columbia beef on prairie grains or grains from the Peace River country will now be an impossibility as a result of the increased costs associated with the transportation of grain. A number of the lumber producers from central British Columbia have indicated an interest in seeing this legislation introduced because they are assuming that it will perhaps result in decreased freight rates for themselves, or at least a slowing of the increase of transportation rates for forest products.

● (1800)

There is nothing in this legislation that provides those guarantees that the moneys provided by the taxpayers of Canada to the railways of Canada will result in reduced freight rates for other commodities such as forest products. Again, a number of issues are of concern to residents of British Columbia as well as of the prairie Provinces.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[English]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 45 deemed to have been moved.

RAILWAYS—CROWSNEST PASS RATE—OPPOSITION TO
ANNOUNCED CHANGES. (B) DEVELOPMENT OF GRAIN
TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon West): Mr. Speaker, we have before us one of the most important pieces of agricultural legislation dealt with by this House during this century. The future of Western Canada and the directions we will choose for our farmers are contained in this legislation.

Throughout the 18 months process of consultation leading up to the introduction of this legislation, the Opposition has been systematically excluded. We now find that on a piece of legislation of this importance the Government has seen fit to introduce closure after two days of second reading debate. I truly wonder about the state of our democracy and question whether the Government will be able to continue to call itself democratic in any way, shape or form. This is particularly odious, considering the lack of any support for this Government in the region of Canada most affected by this legislation. Since my right to speak as a Member of Parliament on behalf of my constituents has been so severely curtailed, I am taking this opportunity to continue the thrust of my remarks I had entered into earlier today during the debate.

I think it is important to discuss the impact that this new bureaucracy may have on the functioning of the Canadian Wheat Board. It appears that the grain transportation agency administrator and the Senior Grain Transportation Committee will assume a considerable amount of the Wheat Board's power to allocate cars. In the world of the international grain

market, the ability of the selling agent to spot cars and move grain, to respond to any situation promptly and effectively, is crucial. If we undermine the Wheat Board we undermine the system, and I really question the need or desirability of such action.

I suppose the Minister will consider what I have had to say, and perhaps my words will be tossed into his garbage can like the words of the so-called reactionaries. But I say to the Minister and to other Members that we are dealing with an industry that is often operating on a marginal base. If the Government pushes this proposal through and it is implemented, is the Minister sure of the impact it will have on Western Canada and throughout Canada?

The Minister has made much of certain selected statements from various farm leaders and western politicians. He did an excellent job of taking general statements out of context and implying that the speaker supported the specific plan being proposed. Let me refer the Minister to comments made in the Saskatchewan legislature by the Deputy Premier of Saskatchewan on May 13 who described the present package as completely and absolutely unacceptable. I want to tell the Minister that I, too, have had some correspondence with westerners, including farmers and producers. Not one letter has supported a change. Let me give the House an idea of what is being said in the correspondence I have received.

A farmer writes from Saskatoon:

I am a small farmer farming near Saskatoon, and we lost money on our operation in 1982. I am saying this so you will realize why I want the Crow rate left alone. Farmers just can't afford a change that will cost more money.

From Langham:

The Crow is our right. Let's hang on to it. We cannot afford more expenses. What good is all the labour and toil if we have no crop, or as it seems now, can't keep up our payments?

From Saskatoon:

I would like to urge you, as a Member of Parliament, to oppose very strongly Mr. Pepin's plan to change the Crow rate.

It is a very complicated system. A way of coming in the backdoor and putting far too great a burden on the farmers.

From Laird:

As a farmer and Permit Book Holder in Western Canada, I am against the removal of the Crow's nest Freight Agreement.

From Perdue, Saskatchewan:

I attended the farm rally in Saskatoon to greet Pepin last week. If he fails to acknowledge that farmers in this area are opposed to increased rates, then he is attempting to ignore the true situation. The gathering organized by the NFU attracted non-union farmers also, and quite a few farmers, like myself, nearing retirement age and some retired. It is a critical issue.

From Delisle:

The railways still need incentive to move our grain efficiently. So it looks like they have to be paid.

Taking all of that money out of the producers' pockets is just not fair though. If we pay the total cost of transporting grain our profits will be cut in half . . . and that's too much to pay, for anyone.

I have letters from Kinley, Hepburn, Harris, Hague and dozens of other communities. One letter states: