

Canadian Wheat Board Act

Mr. Clark (Brandon—Souris): I see that the Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin) who is anxious to become the agriculture critic for his Party is present and making his usual interventions.

Mr. Benjamin: I have been around that business longer than you have.

Mr. Clark (Brandon—Souris): The key thing in the amendments is that up until this point in time farmers have been charged for services which they have not received. We simply do not feel that that is a philosophically sound position. We feel that it is appropriate that those who use the services should pay for them. If we establish in the future that users of producer cars are receiving services for which they do not at present pay, then it would only be appropriate at that time to pass those charges on to them. At the moment it is very clear that the users of producer cars or railway cars are paying for services that they would use if they used the country system. Therefore, it is only appropriate that they should not pay the total cost currently charged to them. I would point out that under the amendments they will continue to pay a certain portion of the costs which would be incurred if they were to use the service. In that sense, we feel that they are paying for a share of the line elevator company expenses, and we think that it is just.

On behalf of the Government we are happy to bring Bill C-92 to third reading. We believe that it has had an extensive debate and we hope that it receives the concurrence of the House.

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-92 contains a number of provisions, most of which are technical and not controversial. The provision to allow the Canadian Wheat Board to borrow in foreign markets, from provincial governments, and a whole variety of agencies, provides additional flexibility. I would caution the Wheat Board that other Crown corporations have found themselves in serious difficulty. For instance, Eldorado Nuclear borrowed some \$500 or \$600 million in Swiss francs. It has borrowed United States dollars in overseas markets. It has lost something like \$190 million on foreign exchange trading. The Wheat Board deals with much larger amounts of money than Eldorado Nuclear, but it is still a Crown corporation, and great caution should be exercised in this regard. Obviously we want to see the Wheat Board borrow its money as cheaply as possible, but great caution has to be observed by Crown corporations when borrowing in foreign exchange markets, particularly when the Canadian dollar and the United States dollar have lost ground in foreign exchange trading. That caution should be put in place in passing Bill C-92.

The most controversial part of this legislation is the producer car provision contained in Clause 8 which provides for the Canadian Wheat Board to pay a sum to the users of producer cars to cover those services they do not use, that is,

storage charges, interest and carrying charges because they load their own cars. This issue has been very hotly debated. The Prairie Pools Incorporated are opposing it.

In committee, the concern of most people was what impact that will have on the maintenance of the country delivery points if producer cars were to assume a very large percentage of the shipments, because there are certain costs involved which are not storage or carrying charges relating to the costs of country delivery points, for example, the maintenance of infrastructure, and so on. This Bill simply deals with the Canadian Wheat Board Act. It does not deal with the Western Grain Transportation Act which is covered.

I thought that the Government made a mess of things because it would not provide the documentation and the information. We wrote to the railway companies and their response was that they did not know what it cost to maintain a rural delivery point, and they could not give us those figures. We could not put forward amendments relating to the Western Grain Transportation Act because Bill C-92 only relates to the Canadian Wheat Board Act.

I put forward an amendment which was promptly voted down. If the Government is defeated in the next election, it will be because of its overwhelming majority and its assumption that everything that the Opposition puts forward is wrong and does not deserve any consideration. The government Members vote by rote. They automatically vote it down.

My amendment simply stated that the sum refunded to those who use producer cars shall reflect an equitable allocation of the costs incurred by the board to maintain the country delivery points. The wheat pools are not saying that there should not be some reduction related to the storage and handling charges. Obviously, those people are not using the storage and handling charges. They are saying that the maintenance of those rural delivery points is something that comes under another Act and cannot be amended in this Bill.

That is why I put forward an amendment which would have relieved some concern. We do not know, but perhaps those storage, handling, and elevator charges are identical. If the Government had come forward and stated that the cost for charges which are not used is much more than the cost of maintaining the rail sidings and the country delivery points, there would have been some balancing. But the Government did not do that and, of course, it did not accept the amendment. I do not understand why the Government did not accept the amendment. I hope that the Senate will consider it. Apart from striking the whole clause which is proposed, it seems to me that it strikes a balance that we tried to reach, that people who use producer cars pay their fair share of the country delivery points and still may be eligible for some reduction in those costs which they do not use, but the Government did not accept it.