

Western Grain Transportation Act

taken place over a number of years. The debate on the changes to the Crow rate is a debate, I submit, Mr. Speaker, about equity. It is about equity between regions in this country.

We have seen the kind of nervousness which developed when Quebec itself got into the discussion of the Crowsnest Pass freight rate. We have seen the kind of nervousness which was reflected by the very substantial change in policy on behalf of the Liberal Government in its outlook and its presentation of the Bill which we are now debating. The equity question came up, certainly, as it pertains to farmers in various parts of the country.

However, more importantly, the whole question of equity is most paramount when you look at the question of farm commodities, being grain vis-à-vis the livestock sector and also the special crops sector in this country. Therein, Mr. Speaker, at least in my opinion, lies the greatest weakness in this legislation—this whole question of equity. The Bill as proposed clearly does not give the kind of equity which we hoped we would see when we set out some months ago now on this very long process of changing and updating the transportation rate so that it would reflect more the realities of Canada.

We moved along through the process, the first stage of which was generally known as the Gilson process. It was generally recognized that while the Gilson Report had a lot of faults admittedly, it did have equity, or at least it tried to address the question of equity with respect to livestock. How do you treat livestock, which is such an important component of western Canada and western Canadian life? How do you treat livestock in a manner which is fair and equitable to the grain segment of our society? The Gilson process, in my opinion one which is shared by some other Members of my Party, at least tried to address that problem in a realistic manner. Unfortunately, Bill C-155 does not address that question and I can vote against the legislation on that basis alone.

There are other things that concern Members, of course, but the fact remains that the livestock industry and to some extent the secondary processing industry have been left out of this legislation. They must have a part in the development of western Canada and the fact that they have been left out is causing great concern. Many important voices, and I am talking about the leaders of the farming groups, have voiced this concern since the Bill was presented. At present there is a desperate move by prairie farm groups to try to find a way to include the livestock industry in this legislation.

The Conservative Party, Mr. Speaker, has come up with a proposal now termed as freedom of choice, which would allow the producer to determine whether the federal Government payments will be made to himself or to the railway. That is an equitable approach. But the Government certainly has not given us any indication as to whether or not that will be adopted. The central and important question is that unless there are some changes to this legislation the livestock industry in western Canada is in danger of extinction over the coming year. That is a fact of life. Over the last number of years, Mr. Speaker, there has been a noticeable shift of the livestock

industry from western Canada to eastern Canada, along with, to a large extent, the packing industry. With the packing industry have gone jobs. Of course, we must keep in mind that it does not take too many people to raise and feed cattle for market, but it takes a lot of people to operate the industry as a whole. That shift of jobs out of western Canada will continue under this legislation. That is why the livestock industry is in the forefront of all the people who want a change, and it is also the reason why the livestock industry is so opposed to this particular piece of legislation.

This Bill does not promote equity. It does not recognize that the West has more to offer than just growing grain. It has livestock, special crops and the processing involved. All that will be lost if this Bill is allowed to pass in its present form. We in this Party have put forward what I consider to be probably one of the most innovative amendments I have seen in the House of Commons in a long time. It is the key to unlocking the door to equity in western Canada. It must go through. If it is not passed, certainly our Party must present it in the next election campaign and hopefully introduce it into legislation in 1984-85.

Mr. Arnold Malone (Crowfoot): Mr. Speaker, while I am pleased to speak on this important issue, I wish I had half an hour to address my concerns over this legislation instead of just ten minutes. However, at the outset I do want to say that the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) has been here during this debate, unlike the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) who has spent virtually zero time here. It is not his Bill, but he ought to be concerned about it.

We are dealing today with a Bill of great importance not only to western Canada but to Canada as a whole. It is a myth to keep talking in this country about East and West, and we have to stop doing so. The fact of the matter is that when we talk about the enhancement of secondary industry in western Canada, that means a tremendous potential growth in eastern Canada. When a westerner buys a new refrigerator or another car or a new suit of clothes, generally speaking they are manufactured in central Canada. We should remember this.

For those people, Mr. Speaker, who doubt that there should be a Crow rate at all, I would point out that this country has a transportation policy based on the theory of competition. That theory works very well, Sir, in those parts of Canada where in fact you have competition. However, when you get into the landlocked regions of the country, there is no competition. The fact that we can ship iron and steel products from Toronto to Vancouver and back to Calgary cheaper than we can ship them directly to Calgary underscores why some form of special rate is needed on the Prairies. If we had in the Prairies a Port of Halifax or a Port of Vancouver, if we had a St. Lawrence River or a Great Lakes water system, then the debate in this House would not be about the Crow rate but about some other form of equitable freight rate without any kind of subsidy at all. What we are dealing with, as the Hon. Member for Lisgar (Mr. Murta) said, is the principle of equity in transportation throughout the country.