

Western Grain Transportation Act

I thought we had a good debate. We debated this issue on Thursday and Friday. There were excellent speeches made. It was not a debate that was tarnished with innuendo and bitterness. It was a frank, forthright and intelligent debate. I thought the debate was going very well. I thought we were expanding and exploring some alternatives to the piece of legislation that was brought forth. However, that has all gone down the drain, and with it some of the goodwill the Minister of Transport may have generated throughout the country in his attempt to deal with the Crow rate issue.

As I said in my speech on Thursday, we are dealing here with a piece of legislation that is a linguistic labyrinth. It is very complicated. I think other Members have referred to the rhetoric which will now define what the future statutory freight rate will be. Nobody really understands it. My colleague, the Hon. Member for Kindersley-Lloydminster (Mr. McKnight), asked the President of CN Rail in committee the other day whether he could describe what the current statutory freight rate would be under Clause 36 or Clause 37 of this Bill. The President said he could not. He does not understand it. If someone such as the President of the CNR does not understand it, how is a farmer to understand it?

This Bill is divisive. There is no question about that. There is division within the West and there is division within the country. The Bill is incomplete. The Minister said he was going to bring forth a safety net and tie the new statutory freight rate to the farmer's ability to pay. We have had no elaboration on that whatever. The Minister has failed to elaborate on that in second reading. Because he has failed, the Minister has said simply, "We will take it to committee." We know the Minister's bottom line is to get the Bill through before the end of June. We cannot debate a pig in a poke, Mr. Speaker. He says he will add other specialty crops. Where are they and what are they? There are other things which the Minister is supposed to incorporate in this Bill. The fact is we do not really know what the Minister's bottom line is, and that adds further to the anxiety, the apprehension, the suspicion and to the mistrust.

There has been, as Members have indicated, some recognition on the part of farmers that perhaps they should pay more toward the movement of their grain. This kind of action will further fan the flames of mistrust and suspicion. We have a Government that has no Members elected to the House of Commons west of Winnipeg, that is tearing down a historical and statutory right and ramming it through the House of Commons. The Government will ram it through committee and through report stage. We know that because that appears to be its bottom line. It will ram through a measure which will hurt individual producers, agriculture and the Canadian economy. Most of all, it is an affront to this institution, to Members of Parliament and to parliamentary democracy. It should not be tolerated on any issue, but most of all it should not be tolerated on an issue as fundamentally important as this one.

● (1700)

I am not sure whether the Minister realizes that with his move to invoke closure he is fanning the flames of division and

bitterness in the country. I am sorry to say that because he is a man who has spent, as I said last Thursday, a good deal of his time working for the federation of Canada. He has been a Member of Parliament, he served on the Task Force on National Unity and is generally perceived to be a person who wants to see the country work and function together in harmony. I say in all sincerity that his action today is generating bitterness, division and disunity. Furthermore, the actions of his colleague today in moving the time allocation motion constitute blatant contempt for the parliamentary process.

One has to look at it in this context. This issue has been around for quite some time, but it has not been debated in the House for any length of time. It all started back on February 8, 1982, when the Minister of Transport made a statement in Winnipeg about his approach to dealing with the Crowsnest Pass freight rates. That was when he set up the Gilson process, and on June 28, 1982, the Gilson Report was released. Once again the Minister made a statement. Where? On both occasions he made them in the City of Winnipeg, not in the House of Commons. Not one of his colleagues in the House of Commons made a statement here so that Hon. Members could have responded, asked questions or sought clarification. No, the statements were made outside the House. He circumvented the parliamentary process. Then again on August 4 he made another statement outside the House of Commons, another very important statement in the entire process. On February 1, 1983, the Minister made an announcement of his legislative intentions. Where was this announcement made? It was not in Ottawa, not in the House of Commons, but again in Winnipeg, again circumventing the parliamentary process. Finally, on May 5, 1982, he announced his so-called revisions to his originally intended piece of legislation. He made that announcement at the national parliamentary press theatre. He had the audacity to walk across the street and to refuse to make that statement in the House of Commons.

Today, after two full days of debate, closure is introduced. The Bill was introduced for debate last Thursday. It was debated on Friday and again today. These are ten-minute speeches. Hon. Members of Parliament from western Canada just get warmed up in ten minutes. As one Member pointed out, there is a good hour's speech in every western Member because it is a very fundamental, emotional and political issue. There is no question about that. We are fearful that the mould is cast. It is quite clear what the Government wants to do. It will ram it through the House of Commons and through committee because it wants it passed by June 30 before Parliament recesses. This Bill will be in for a rough time, I can guarantee that.

Mr. Fred McCain (Carleton-Charlotte): Mr. Speaker, this is but another example of the expression of Government policy which has not considered Canada as a nation. The Hon. Member for Medicine Hat (Mr. Hargrave), more recently the Hon. Member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski), and other prairie Members have explained very clearly their perception