

Western Grain Transportation Act

However, let us not find ourselves throwing out the baby with the bath water. We should come up with a system that works in the best interests of farmers and of the grain handling system, which could well turn out to be one of the best in the world. The Government has specifically keyed in on the expectations of the railways and their best interests. There has been an unfair balance in looking at the problems of primary producers in terms of sanctions and better grain movement.

That is about all I have to say on the motions before the House. However, I suggest it is most important to look at a balance so that grain elevators, terminals, ports, railways and producers can work together in the best interests of a better grain movement system.

Mr. Jim Fulton (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to enter into the debate on the three motions before the House. I was glad the Chair ruled that Motion No. 36 was in order. I think it is important for a number of reasons. Particularly, it amends Clause 18 by striking out lines 44 to 47.

Clause 18 was described by the Hon. Member for Saskatoon West (Mr. Hnatyshyn) as being the most cockamamie set of regulations he has ever seen. That does not seem to be born out by the voting record of the Tories in committee. On the Crow Bill they just happened to vote with the Liberals all the way through. Most grain producers in western Canada recognize that there is an alliance behind the scenes in committee and in private meetings between the Minister of Transport (Mr. Axworthy) and the Tory Party. However, when they are out on the Prairies or giving speeches in the House of Commons, they certainly attempt to show a different side than they demonstrate in their voting record.

Motion No. 36 reads:

That Bill C-155 be amended in Clause 18 by striking out lines 44 to 47 at page 8 and lines 1 to 41 at page 9 and substituting the following therefor:

"should be met by any railway company

(d) monitor the performance of the railway companies to ascertain whether or not they are meeting the performance objectives referred to in paragraph (c); and

(e) develop, for possible implementation under section 21, a scheme of sanctions applicable to railway companies and make recommendations to the Minister on the advisability of implementing that scheme."

The reference to railway companies, of course, includes CN, CP or whoever happens to be moving grain. I concur with one of the comments made by the Hon. Member for Saskatoon West, that western Canadians are really being asked to buy a pig in a poke. It is clear that the Government and its "experts" in the field have no idea what will be the real medium or long-term impact of the Crow Bill. Prairie farmers recognize that 30,000 or 40,000 farms will disappear, will simply go up in mortgage smoke as a result of the Crow Bill. At the same time there are certain real estate interests readying themselves to buy up all these farms because the information available from the Global 2000 Report and other reports is that one of the most valuable long-term assets in the world is Canadian farms and farm lands.

The last speaker proposed that we have two agencies to do one job. We recognize—certainly I do in Prince Rupert—that

something had to be done a long time ago. When the Tories were in office they brought someone in to say that there were bottlenecks. Every one on the Prairies knew where the bottlenecks were. They did not go away by having a grain Administrator observe them.

The powers being proposed by the Liberals through Clause 18 and other clauses in the Bill are ludicrous. The proposals would take sanctions against those one would think the Government of Canada would not take sanctions against. I will finish my remarks on Motion No. 36, then deal with Motions Nos. 37 and 38 and point out the serious problems with the Liberals and the Tories being together on Clause 18.

The intent of Motion No. 36 is to ensure that sanctions for failing to meet performance objectives apply only to the railroads. Other speakers from my Party have made it clear that there is not a great deal of sense in financial penalties against the Canadian Wheat Board, individual elevators or individual producers, whether they be a direct financial attack or holding back on the available number of boxcars. It is clear that the holding back of the available number of boxcars will penalize producers once again, either directly through pool funds or by simply backlogging elevators so that they cannot make deliveries. What happens is that the person holding the grain is supposed to be penalized by not getting the boxcars, but in fact he is obtaining funds for "storing" the grain in the interim period.

The powers which are proposed to be handed over are ludicrous. I wonder whether many of the powers are really required. The system under the Canadian Wheat Board seems to be working reasonably well. There is no doubt that there are bottlenecks, but to propose the powers in the legislation will not streamline the system; they will simply create more bottlenecks and more difficulties for Canadian farmers.

There are four key points in Motion No. 36. The first is that the legislation would give the Administrator the power to impose sanctions on the Canadian Wheat Board and the pools, if he so chose, and the ability of the Administrator to do so is removed by the amendment. In our view and in the view of most Canadian farmers, it is clear that to give the Administrator those powers over the Canadian Wheat Board and the Wheat Pools is unacceptable.

● (1250)

Second, there is no need to have a provision for imposing sanctions on anyone but the railroads. We recognize that the problems we have had, whether getting grain to Prince Rupert, Vancouver, the Lakehead or Churchill, have in almost every situation resulted from the railroads. If we go back a few years to 1977 and those years when Parliament was turning over huge barrels of money to the railroads to upgrade certain branch lines, we see that the money never made it to the branch lines. There was no new grade, no new ties, no new rails and no new crossings. CN and CP have demonstrated a near total disregard for the desire of Parliament. We say that if Clause 18 passes as it stands, there will be chaos in the system. Certain changes have to be obtained.