

Department of Transport Act

Mr. Knight: I am glad to know that there is at least one minister who admits that he can learn.

Mr. Marler: I hope I did not admit that too readily.

Mr. Knight: After that pleasant interruption by the minister, I should like to quote Mr. Gordon as follows:

We have to keep that in mind and also, in the matter of moving grain, there are a number of controlled situations in the movement of grain, and the wheat board as I understand it, has absolute authority in the matter of determining what grades of wheat should be moved. The railways have nothing to do with that at all. We do what we are told.

I smiled to myself a little when Mr. Gordon made that statement.

The transport controller has also a degree of authority to instruct how various movements of grain should be moved and what order of priority from here to there over the country, etc., etc.

Mr. Gordon then went on to deal with something else. When Mr. Gordon was giving that evidence on that particular occasion I gathered the impression that he was placing the responsibility fairly and squarely on the back of the wheat board.

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Chairman, there are two questions I should like to ask. If the wheat board has control of the situation and controls the allocation of box cars, why is this legislation before us at all? I put a question to the Minister of Trade and Commerce in January and perhaps I can get the information I was after from the Minister of Transport. Why was such a large amount of space allowed to accumulate in the terminal elevators at a time of year when there was a rush of grain and the farmers needed money so badly? Was that the fault of the controller? Was there a shortage of box cars? What was the real reason why that amount of space was allowed to accumulate at that critical time?

Mr. Marler: Mr. Chairman, I shall try to deal with the second question first. I suppose I could ask the hon. member why it is that there seems to be so much vacant elevator space at country points at the present time. The hon. member knows full well that the matter of filling vacant space in terminal or other elevators is not something which depends either upon the Minister of Transport or the transport controller. I am sure the hon. member realizes that that is not part of the functions of the transport controller and, quite obviously by the same argument, of the minister of the Department of Transport.

The first question asked by the hon. member seems to imply that once a car is loaded the matter is finished, but that is not the

case. It seems to me to be perfectly obvious that the function of the transport controller is to co-ordinate the movements which take place to see that cars are in the appropriate spot when vessels are there to load. I hope it will not be necessary for me to go very much further in connection with the matter. It is not just a matter of loading a box car with grain and saying that that is the end of the operation. That is not an operation for which the transport controller is responsible. He is responsible for the co-ordination of movements subsequent to that.

Mr. Johnson (Kindersley): When the Canadian wheat board authorizes a shipment from an elevator does it not authorize that shipment to a certain point? My own elevator agent has told me that a certain car was billed for Port Arthur or Fort William or Churchill. The railway just has to pick it up and take it there.

Mr. Marler: I think they do, but having expressed it in that simple language, to say that it is carried out in the way that it is required, perhaps I should give my hon. friend an illustration. So far as the movement of grain from Atlantic ports is concerned, I am told that one of the functions carried out by Mr. Rowan in Montreal is that of keeping in touch with agents of ocean vessels to tell them to which port a vessel should be sent in order to get the grades they wish to load. In some instances that requires direction. The cars may have been originally intended to go to Halifax but it may be necessary to reroute them to Saint John. I am merely giving that as an illustration of the fact that the primary responsibility of the transport controller is one of co-ordinating the various agencies of transport required for the movement of grain in different parts of the country and fitting that movement of grain with the movement of other bulk cargoes.

I was going through my correspondence in connection with the matter not very long ago and was interested to see that the transport controller had said that during the season of navigation he was responsible for the movement of about 7,000,000 tons of ore, about 14,000,000 tons of coal, about 800,000 tons of limestone, various quantities of pulpwood, all in addition to the movement of wheat and other grain. At first sight one might suppose that these operations could be carried out automatically, but I do not believe that an operation so complex as the movement of grain from the western provinces to the Pacific coast or to the lakehead and thence to Atlantic ports is something that can be left without direction.