

Mr. Charles Mayer (Portage-Marquette): Mr. Speaker—

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mayer: I appreciate the recognition from my left. I am not sure they will want to applaud when I am finished with them, but I thank them anyway.

Bill C-155 is a very important Bill. The title of the Bill is "An Act to facilitate the transportation, shipping and handling of western grain and to amend certain Acts in consequence thereof".

I am glad to see the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) here. I believe, as do most Members of the House, that he is a very honourable gentleman, well respected on both sides of the House. I want to point out to him some of the concerns that we in western Canada have over this Bill and caution him, as did the former Minister, the Hon. Member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski) that he should proceed quite slowly and deliberately on this issue. When I say that, I mean that he should do so in the House because the Bill really has not been dealt with properly until it has been in the House. It is unfortunate that the Government has chosen to allow, facilitate or encourage as much discussion as we have had on this issue outside the House.

The reason I read the title of the Bill is that this Bill deals with much more than transportation. To western Canada transportation is not simply the moving of goods from one point to another. It is not simply two pieces of steel spanning the Prairies. It is tied up with the reason why western Canada exists. Without the railway, western Canada would probably not have developed as quickly or in the way that it did.

Anyone familiar with western Canada knows how important the railroads have been to western Canada. They are the reason for many small towns settling where they did. The reason for the configuration of some of the cities is the effect on them of the railways. I have said this before, and I am sure the Minister can appreciate it, that in some ways transportation means to Western Canada what language means to Quebec. That bears some explanation.

I grew up in the middle of Saskatchewan. I remember how important railways were to the little community in which I lived. It was something for my father to point out to me in the middle of the night that hearing a train whistle meant that you were somehow hooked up and connected with the outside world. It meant that you were not totally isolated and ignored. It also meant something in terms of the weather. When you listened to a train whistle, you could tell if there was a different kind of front moving in. It was all tied up in the reason we were there, which was to produce something off the land. When you start talking about transportation, those are some of the things that come to the minds of the people of western Canada.

I remember my father showing me how he could read numbers on a boxcar which was sitting 15 or 16 miles away from where we lived. That may sound melodramatic or corny, but when you think about it you can see how important

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transportation was and still is to those of us in western Canada. When you deal with the transportation issue, that is what you are dealing with when railways are involved. It is more than something you approach from a rational basis, cerebral basis or a purely economic basis. It is something that is inside us. It is tied up with our emotions.

That is the reason why the former Minister, the Hon. Member for Vegreville, suggested we should proceed slowly with this Bill. Again I point out that by slowly I mean we should proceed slowly in terms of the process in the House.

• (1630)

Another reason why I think we need to use some caution is that this is not a good time of the year for anybody connected with the land to look at something that is as fundamental as transportation. Right now we are going through a very critical time in farming. It is the spring season and it is the time for putting crops in the ground. To take time off from planting and sowing is something that farmers just cannot do if there is to be any kind of prospect for a crop. So again, we need some time in order to understand what the Government is proposing.

It seems to me that another reason we have to approach this with a lot of caution is that, right or wrong, there is a lot of mistrust of the railways. I would suggest that the railways have brought on much of it themselves. I refer particularly to the CPR. The country has been very kind and good to the CPR. It has made it the largest company in the country, and in many ways the most profitable company in the country. Yet, if you ever try to look for any evidence of what the railways have done, particularly what CPR has done for the country, you will not find it. I do not see that they have funded one university, I do not see that they have contributed in any major way to any research that has been done in universities.

Take the little town that I come from, Carberry, as an example. They took away the passenger depot. Everybody from western Canada knows what is meant by a depot. The depot became harder to heat and it became uneconomical, so they decided to simply tear it down. I find that very sad. When driving in town now, you can look right down Main Street and you can see right past the place where the station used to be. That is unfortunate because, as I have said, the railways benefited tremendously from the country, and yet when it comes time for them to put something back in as a memento or to contribute to the town in the form of a museum, that does not happen. If we mistrust the railways, it is brought on in some ways by their own actions. I would suggest that in many areas, the railways have been very inconsiderate and insensitive to the community.

There was an instance in Toronto, that was recently made public through the media of the CP smashing down a station with a ball and chain. From what I have read and from what I can recollect from the news reports, that station could have been kept, and I am sure in my own area they would have liked to have kept the station. It could have been maintained as a museum and it would have served us as a link with our past. We are proud of our history and proud of our past with which