

Movement of Grain

Mr. Mazankowski: Quite frankly, we think this is an opportunity to bring forth comments and recommendations by the respective political parties. To be quite honest, I find the motion very simplistic. We think that the problems with respect to grain handling and transportation require a much more comprehensive analysis and solution, and that simply to confine ourselves to the two elements contained in the motion, I do not think, with all due respect to my friend, would resolve the problems in grain handling and transportation.

Once again we have noted today that the NDP is using its age-old whipping boy, the CPR, to advance its solutions to the problem. I was wondering whether the hon. member was going to go so far, but he finally did get to the point when he renewed his party's suggestion and belief that CPR should be nationalized. That too is a very simplistic solution which, in my opinion, does not deserve serious consideration. While saying that, I acknowledge, as, I am sure, do all other members of the House, that certainly the railways must share the responsibility in this very important issue, but it requires a much more penetrating insight than simply to attack the railways, as did the hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre. I suspect he thinks it is great political fodder for him in his constituency and indeed in the province of Saskatchewan, and perhaps to some extent in Alberta. Quite frankly, I think he is less than fair in confining his remarks to that particular sector. I think he is being unfair, and he should know that there is a whole lot more to the question of grain handling than simply the railways.

There is much hypocrisy which emanates from my friends to the left. We have been talking about the importance of moving grain to export, and yet when the government brings in legislation to end the engineers' strike on the Great Lakes—an action which received almost unanimous support from western Canada, including the socialist premier from Saskatchewan, urging the Prime Minister and the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) to end this strike—what did my friends from the NDP do? They voted against that measure.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Mazankowski: Whom do they serve, the union leaders or the farmers? They cannot have it both ways. Here is a classic example of the kind of hypocrisy that emanates from those members time after time, and the plot seems to thicken when we get to an election period. My friend cannot have it both ways—he has to serve one master, not two.

The hon. member says that the Canadian Wheat Board should have more authority. I am not sure to what authority he is referring. He also pointed out that one of the problems we have in the country today is that the system is plugged with non-board grains. I challenged him to document that evidence, but he could not or would not. I am not sure whether he has that information, but my figures indicate that the stocks of non-board grains range anywhere from 3.5 per cent to as high as 6 per cent in some elevator systems.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

● (1602)

If he and the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom) knew anything about farming and had to face the challenge of meeting fertilizer and fuel bills, they would know very well that the open market price for barley is the same and sometimes greater than the initial price paid by the Canadian Wheat Board. If farmers want to maintain a cash flow and pay their bills, they are forced to sell on the open market, because the Canadian Wheat Board simply is not selling barley. I challenge the hon. member to telephone the Canadian Wheat Board. He will be given the same answer. There does not seem to be much opportunity for an additional quota on barley in the foreseeable future. At least that is what I have been told by officials in the Canadian Wheat Board.

There are many complexities in the grain handling and transportation system. They involve producers, grain handling companies, railways, workers involved in the various sectors of this business, shipping fleets, the Canadian Wheat Board, and customers. The smooth operation of the grain handling and transportation system is affected by internal and external influences. As a matter of fact the weather has a great bearing on the success of the operation of the entire system.

Mr. Benjamin: That is Otto's excuse.

Mr. Mazankowski: I have to agree with the minister in that regard. Anyone associated with the production and movement of grain would realize that the weather cannot be overlooked.

Today the system is in a mess. The mood is strong in western Canada. There is frustration and disgust over the inability to move grain. The country elevator system literally is plugged. More than 75 per cent of its potential capacity is utilized. The stocks are 40 per cent to 50 per cent higher than a year ago. Producer-farm deliveries this year are down 35 per cent to 40 per cent from a year ago. Farm stocks amount to approximately 42 million tonnes. They have increased 20 per cent from a year ago. I see the minister shaking his head. These figures come from the Canada Grains Council and the Canada Grains Commission. Perhaps they have changed in the last week or so, but they are the ones I have. The terminals are less than half full. There are 35 per cent less stocks than a year ago.

The Canadian Wheat Board stated categorically that it has turned down barley sales. We are losing out traditional markets of Russia and China. I agree with the hon. member when he expressed concern about the fact that we face some stiff competition from the United States in terms of maintaining our market with China. According to the Canada Grains Council, our present stocks of wheat, including the production of this year and the carryover of last year, are in excess of 30 million tonnes. That represents almost half of the total world wheat trade.

There is concern about the breakdown in the co-ordination of the movement of grain in the country and the interface between matching up our markets and our shipping targets. The Canadian Wheat Board has summarized this problem by