

As you may well know, Mr. Speaker, the history of transportation in western Canada has often suffered from monopoly service. The essence of competition, of course, and of the so-called free enterprise system, is that it works to the advantage of the consumer. However, that system applies effectively only when there is, in fact, competition. So often that has not been the case in the west where one is dealing with a lesser populated area. I must express therefore, Mr. Speaker, some very real reservations, as the Hon. Member for Brandon-Souris about the future of our community in terms of air service if we move irresponsibly into the area of complete deregulation.

● (1650)

I have also some very real concerns about what is happening in the area of the transportation system with respect to the movement of grain. Nothing is more vital to the economy of western Canada than the movement of grain. The very well being of our farmers, and of the communities and businesses which serve them, depends first of all upon the quantity and quality of the crop and, second, upon our ability to move our grain to market in an efficient, prompt and economical manner.

Unfortunately, the record of this Government is such that that criteria has not been fulfilled as often as the people of western Canada would want. I think particularly of the farmers in my community who are served by the Canadian National Railways, and the extreme frustration which they have felt by virtue of the fact that grain movement in those communities has not been equal to that of other communities. I state this for the record in order to bring this to the attention of the Minister, and I hope that he will address himself to this problem.

I am also concerned about particular communities in my constituency, and many others of a similar nature, which are suffering from a lack of adequate rail line maintenance. I think specifically of a line which may not seem very important to this Parliament, but which is very important to the people who count, the ordinary Canadians who are served by the Deloraine Waskada Line. Promises were made in the past that this line would be rehabilitated. However, despite the urgent requests of Jim Downey of the MLA, a mayor and a reeve from those communities, so far nothing has been done. It seems to be the case of promises made and promises broken.

Unfortunately, in 51 of the last 63 years there has been felt in western Canada a sense of cynicism and alienation. This is very distressing to me because I am a Canadian who worries about the future of Canada should the west as a region become too dissatisfied. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, that cynicism, alienation and dissatisfaction is so genuine and so much a product of the accumulation of years and years that it will take more than one or two years, or even four years of a new government which is sensitive to and aware of the needs of western Canada before the damage of the past can be undone.

There is a tremendous crisis in western Canada today, as you know from discussions we have had in the House. Farm prices are declining. Farm bankruptcies are accelerating at an

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almost unbelievable and, certainly, an unforgiveable rate. What is needed in the west is a Minister and a government which is committed to persuading western Canadians that they are, indeed, a vital part of this nation. Unfortunately, the neglect of the past has caused many western Canadians to fear for their very future. I had hoped, Mr. Speaker, that the appointment of one of the two Liberal Members of Parliament from the west to this very important portfolio would have done something to rectify the grievances which we feel. But that has not been the case.

What we have instead is a Minister who participated over the demise of the Crow, who participated over the destruction of what in fact is part of the western Canadian birthright. In fact, many farmers say to me that the Crow was the only thing they received from Government which made them in any way feel they were the beneficiaries of Government. That, of course, was destroyed despite the pleas of Hon. Members on this side of the House. Even now when we move into the period of re-examination of the Crow there seems to be little urgency on the part of those on the opposite side of the House. As the Hon. Member for Vegreville said in the House the other day, a very important commission should have been appointed by April 1 and, in fact, nothing has been done. Again, to many Hon. Members of this House, Mr. Speaker, that may seem like a small point. However, it is not a small point to the people of western Canada, the farmers, the businessmen who are dependent on those farmers, who simply see, in an accumulation of a number of instances, that in the minds of this Government they do not matter.

In the history of the west transportation has been, second to agriculture, the most vital part of our economy. In fact, Mr. Speaker, if you are familiar with the history of western Canada you will remember that settlers came to the west, to the Red River, as early as 1812, the famous Selkirk settlers. They realized when they settled in the Red River that this was an area which had tremendous potential for agriculture productivity. Many of those farmers were successful, but were discouraged because of their inability to move their product to market.

In fact, it was not until we moved into the period of Confederation, the period of John A. Macdonald, the Conservative Government of that day, that in central Canada the Government began to develop the national transportation framework which linked the west to the east. Since that time, the economy of the west has been dependent upon that very fragile but all important transportation link. I do not believe eastern Canadians have any appreciation of the importance of the railway, or of the importance of the transportation system, because in eastern Canada there are so many alternatives. In western Canada, however, all too often there are virtually no alternatives. In fact, many novelists writing about the history of the west have talked about the rail lines as an essential part of the life of the communities. They realized that in many ways the be-all and end-all of those communities was, in fact, the rail line. Without it they were severed from central