

*Western Grain Transportation Act*

There seem to be two sets of rules, one for the producers and the other for the railroads. Therefore, I have a great deal of concern when the Minister says he has—I believe these are words he used yesterday—“a great deal of sympathy for the railroads and the great losses which were afforded them”. The shortfall has been paid to the railroads year after year by the taxpayer and, quite frankly, I do not see a great deal wrong with that. My position, and I believe the position made clear by the Hon. Member for Vegreville, is that the statutory rate remain and that the Government pick up the shortfall and hold the railroads responsible for rebuilding and putting in place a transportation system which will better serve Canada. And I say Canada and the farmers, because if you break the farmers, you will not be doing Canada a great service. I believe it was Sir Leonard Tilley who said: “Destroy the farmer and grass will grow in the streets of every city in the nation”.

I believe it is important in this debate that we clarify in our minds, not only as farmers, not only as responsible people in this House, but as Canadians, exactly what type of Bill has been presented for the benefit of all Canada.

I would like to speak further on some of the more positive aspects of what I think this Bill should do and what it could do, not only for Canada and for the farmers, but also for the world. I would like to make a comparison with the national energy policy. I would like to ask the Minister what was accomplished by bringing in a policy under the National Energy Program which broke the oil fields, which put workers out of work, the Government then purchased oil from Mexico and other points around the world? Not only did the Canadian people in the oil fields of Alberta and Saskatchewan suffer, but all Canadians suffered because of that legislation.

I see a very close parallel in Bill C-155. What advantage is it going to be to Canada if the farmers are rendered bankrupt, as was raised in the questioning just a little earlier? What benefit will that be to Toronto, to Montreal or to central Canada? It will mean that the farmers will not have money to buy combines, tractors, rubber and steel, and all those things which are bought from the manufacturing areas of Canada. That is why I appeal to the Minister to look carefully at this Bill, at the whole structure of agriculture, of transportation, and the results which will flow from it.

We are faced in agriculture today with some of the highest costs which we have ever known. I mentioned earlier the national energy policy. One of the highest costs which we face, and the Minister must take this into consideration, is the cost of fuel. It has gone up 90 per cent in the last two years, mostly directly related to the national energy policy. We have farmers today who are paying 66 cents a gallon for their diesel and farm fuel. It does not take a large tractor today to hold 150 gallons of diesel fuel, which means \$300 every time the tractor is filled. What do the farmers do? They are wondering just how often they will work their fields. I can tell you that they are cutting back. The farmers in my riding are cutting back in the cultivation of their summer fallow, in their farming operations, simply because of the high cost. What is this going

to do? It is going to have a counterproductive reaction to producing wheat.

I would like to bring out this point as well, Mr. Speaker. The country of Canada produces for export for the benefit of all Canadians some \$6 billion to \$8 billion of surplus trade. This is not important only to the farmer but to the whole economy of Canada. In closing my remarks on this very important subject today, I suggest to the Minister of Transport that if the direction he takes through Bill C-155 proves to be counterproductive to the production of wheat and other agricultural products in Canada, it will have a long-lasting effect not only on agriculture, farmers, towns and villages, but on all of Canada. I ask him to reconsider this Bill seriously.

• (1530)

**Mr. Mazankowski:** Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member mentioned the heavy burden of fuel costs which are largely a result of the federal taxes imposed under the National Energy Program. In order to give us an idea of what the aggregate costs are on an average farm, could the Hon. Member roughly outline what an average fuel bill would be for a two-section farm and, in doing so, would he state what the fuel tax component would be?

**Mr. Gustafson:** Mr. Speaker, I would be glad to answer that question but I cannot be too specific. However, I did some calculations in terms of an average farm, an acre of land and production, and found that the tax alone on farm fuel today at 66 cents a gallon, which is a very exorbitant federal tax, would equal an amount to enable a farmer, in most cases, to ship the grain that that fuel produces. This is an important factor raised by the Hon. Member for Vegreville. Just how much tax can the farmer stand?

We have talked about subsidies. I do not like the word subsidy and I think we should get away from it. The farmer does receive some subsidy, I believe 17 per cent, but he is also paying a very heavy tax in other areas. I think it is important that the Minister take this all into consideration to determine what it will do for agriculture in Canada.

**Mr. Pepin:** Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member seems not to be at least theoretically opposed to the thesis that the farmer should pay a greater share of the cost of transportation of his grain. While he does not seem to disagree with that principle, he seems to disagree with that proposition in practice. He has said that now is not the right time. Could he tell me if there has been in the past ten years, for example, since the value of the Crow has been substantially inferior to the real cost of transportation, a time when that change could have been made? Can he anticipate a time in the future when it could be changed?

**Mr. Gustafson:** Mr. Speaker, of course that is a very hypothetical question but one must take into consideration the ability to pay. I said that the farmer does not now have the ability to pay.