

Western Grain Transportation Act

question, is to have the books of the CN opened, and particularly those of the CPR, so that the public can determine what it really costs to move grain, and to come to some accepted definitions and measurements, again to determine the real cost of moving grain. When we have those figures, then we can sit down with the Wheat Pools and farmers' organizations across Western Canada and perhaps begin some serious discussions. However, as long as those figures do not exist, this exercise is an exercise of Alice in Wonderland, or perhaps it is really a ploy to give more money to the railroads at the expense of the economy of western Canada, Saskatchewan in particular.

We do not even know the effects of this proposed legislation. Concerning production of papers, on July 23, 1982 I asked for any documents the Government might have in terms of subsidies paid in the United States to American farmers compared to the subsidies we receive. My question was addressed to the Government as a whole and the reply was that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) was not aware of the existence of the documents requested. Unless the Government has not conducted any studies on the type of subsidies American and Canadian farmers receive.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Order.

Mr. de Jong: I was just beginning.

Hon. Walter Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I heard my hon. friend, who had begun his speech in the short ten minutes allotted to him, say "I was just beginning", and I thought he was beginning rather well. I am somewhat sorry the rules of the House do not allow him to continue, but those are the rules to which we have agreed. All of us have a few moments in which to speak in the debate.

There are some in this country who regard Bill C-155, the Western Grain Transportation Act, as being a subject which is somehow only of interest to westerners. I do not agree with them. At this stage of the legislation we are discussing a Bill which is fundamental to the country. If there is any country in the world which depends for its existence, its advancement, and its enhancement on transportation, it is Canada. If we were to consider the importance of railroads to the country in opening up the West, ensuring that the West became part of Confederation and, equally, ensuring that the producers in western Canada depending upon the railroads could share in the development of the country, then I think we would suddenly see dawning upon us the realization of the importance of the Bill. I rise today to tell my colleagues, my friends and, indeed, my political opponents on the other side of the House that the Bill is not of significance only to western Canada.

It is important to say that the Bill has its genesis in a number of factors. In particular, I believe it has its genesis in the fact that not only is there no representation from western Canada on the Government's side, that is, representation which really matters, but there is also a complete lack of understanding of the importance of this matter to western Canada.

Someone has described the Crow rate as being the Magna Carta for western Canada. It was the basis upon which western Canada's part in Confederation was given strength and substance. It has gone on for a long period of time. People will wonder, of course, why there is an outcry against the removal of the Crow. Let us put the shoe on the other foot for a few moments. In terms of Bombardier in the Province of Quebec, let us imagine that the Government managed to so arrange its affairs that there would be an increase in the cost for Bombardier, therefore jeopardizing jobs, jeopardizing production, jeopardizing sales by a large percentage over a period of years, the Government then demanding, of course, that such legislation pass through Parliament by the end of June. Could one imagine the outcry in the Province of Quebec if that were the case? Yet that is what is happening in western Canada to a business and to an undertaking which is basic to western Canada.

Could one imagine the screams of outrage there would be in the Province of Ontario if the Government decided to go into the industrial heartland of Ontario and by statute, by Bill, by giving notice of closing off debate, rearrange and change the Province's economic life? Could one not hear the screeches and screams there would be from the Province of Ontario?

If the Government went into Atlantic Canada and tried to do that with the fisheries, would one not hear some screeches of outrage, especially if the attempt were to be coupled with a threat that if such legislation did not pass through Parliament within a short period of time, the Government would use the rules to push it through? Would there not be outrage as well if, in the face of the importance of it, the people were threatened that they would not be allowed to speak? That is the kind of importance western Canada attaches to this matter. I said it had its genesis in the fact that the Liberal Party is not represented in western Canada, and I believe that is true.

One night the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) said publicly, within my hearing; "We have nothing in western Canada, and we have gambled everything on the Crow". That seems to be the attitude of the Government. The Minister says; "The words get the forum". It was taped and it was televised. It was a speech which he made with a television camera on both of us that night. It was therefore public. If it had been said privately, I would never mention it. If anyone is interested, call Ottawa Cablevision.

Mr. Pepin: Oh, I have said it in the West too.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): There it sits. One will see the Member for Nepean-Carleton looking in disbelief at the Minister as he said it. I could not believe it. In any event, there it stands: "We have nothing to lose in western Canada, so we have gambled everything on the Crow".

What does the Crow mean? What did it do? The Crow rate, upon which people relied for years and years, meant that there would be a fixed rate for the transportation of goods.