

Adjournment Debate

political Parties in Manitoba, has been travelling around that Province. Of course there are no Liberal Members on that particular committee. That is understandable because there are no Liberal Members in the Manitoba legislature. That is also understandable because they are not really in tune with the needs of farmers in the West. It was interesting that people from the Liberal Party made presentations and voiced their opposition to the Government action at these hearings. We heard also from people who were supporters of the Conservative Party, and supporters of the New Democratic Party as well.

I have seen solidarity in the West on the position. I know the Parliamentary Secretary is very concerned about solidarity in Poland, as he often discusses it with me. I hasten to add that he is very concerned about solidarity and consensus and wants to pull the sliver out of the eye of the Communist Party in Poland, but he cannot seem to see the beam in solidarity at home. This is the solidarity which I want to impress upon the Government. I just wonder why it is not responding to the feeling of consensus in the West. The response of the Minister was very inadequate. I hope I will receive a more adequate response from the Parliamentary Secretary today.

At least nine objections were included in the Manitoba resolution concerning the policy of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin). I want to mention these for the edification of the Parliamentary Secretary. First, it was indicated that this particular proposal did not recognize the principle of statutory rates for grain. It did not provide cost protection for farmers. It did not recognize that grain must be sold in a competitive international market. It did not remove the distortion in rates by including all prairie crops and their products under the new structure. It did not deal with unacceptably high taxation levels and farm input costs such as fuel. It did not provide sufficient performance guarantees for future growth and development of all facets of prairie agriculture. It prescribed an unacceptable limit of 31.1 million tonnes for subsidized shipment. It provided central Canada with further artificial processing and livestock incentives. It is not supported by a consensus of western Canadians. At least nine concerns were indicated in that resolution.

Farmers in my area will be hit very badly because they will have to pay higher freight rates to move their grain. This will definitely have an impact upon their ability to stay in business. Bankruptcies have already increased greatly in the farming community.

In the second part of my question to the Minister I dealt with rail line abandonment. I tried to point out to the Minister as recently as during today's Question Period that the western arm of the CTC has made some 17 decisions for Manitoba. I am very distraught as not one of them has been in favour of the producer. What is the problem? Looking at some 63 decisions that have been made in the West, only nine were in favour of the producers. In other words, nine of those decisions were against applications by the CNR or CPR for abandonment. Nine out of 63 is one out of seven, which is 14 per cent. I know the Parliamentary Secretary used to be a school

principal. He is a very honest man, a man of integrity. I could not see him passing one of his students at 14 per cent and saying the student was doing a great job. This is exactly the type of policy we get from the Government of Canada.

● (1825)

I have these concerns because there are many situations unique to constituencies like mine.

I see, Mr. Speaker, that you are indicating I should wind down. In closing, I want to say that the alternatives are well nigh impossible in my area. To close an elevator and a line at Amaranth means that people will have to cross the Grass River bog. There is no way they can take their trucks there. This week a bridge has been out of operation on that particular line on the Oakland subdivision at Mile 12.3. This has completely paralyzed the entire grain movement in that area. CN has not been able to do anything about it, and we keep getting phone calls in our area. Just imagine what would happen if they had to normally go across that bog.

I trust that the Parliamentary Secretary will have some satisfactory answers other than the cryptic responses I have received from the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) which I characterized as hammer and sickle responses. I trust that the Parliamentary Secretary will recognize this solidarity in the West.

Mr. Jesse P. Flis (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member and I have debated this topic on many occasions, when he gives me a lift to the airport and while we are waiting for planes. I welcome the opportunity to debate this subject with him further in this chamber. Unfortunately, I am at a bit of a disadvantage because he gets seven minutes and I get three.

The Minister's cryptic answer was probably motivated by the Hon. Member's preoccupation with the double whammy he was trying to put on him, trying to combine abolishing the Crow and the abandonment of branch lines. From today's debate on Bill C-155, the Hon. Member must realize that the opinion is far from unanimous on what to do about the Crow rate. Clearly there was no solidarity today in this Chamber with regard to this Bill.

The Minister to Transport (Mr. Pepin) quoted at length from prominent westerners who called for change to the Crow. The Hon. Member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski), a very distinguished Member of this House, said something to the effect that major western farm organizations favoured an increase in the Crow rate. In fact, it seems only the NDP is against a change in the rate, so the Hon. Member's first whammy is at best only half a whammy.

What about the second whammy, the abandonment of branch lines? As the Minister pointed out, we still have the vast majority of branch lines we had at the peak of the rail system back in the 1930s. Over 80 per cent not only still exist, but are guaranteed in the basic network to the year 2000.

The process of abandonment has to be one of the fairest in existence. The Canadian Transport Commission holds hear-