

Western Grain Transportation Act

Members of the House will be aware that we are not generally in favour of the creation of the Grain Transportation Agency since it is our belief that it simply adds another layer of bureaucracy. We do not want an Administrator whose powers will encroach on that of the Wheat Board. We would prefer that the Wheat Board be given further powers to force the railways to co-operate with each other. If we are to be denied that, definitely the amendment before us would improve the role the Grain Administrator will be performing, and as such we have to support this amendment.

● (1200)

I think it is important when discussing this Bill to reflect briefly on the attitudes the railways have in the shipping of statutory grains particularly, but I think it is true of the shipping of all commodities. The railway philosophy is to hold on to the commodity come hell or high water, to hold on to it as long as possible, because in that way they maximize their return.

There are many examples. Mr. Justice Emmett Hall this summer in his testimony in Regina said that the CN sends grain west to Calgary and then north to Edmonton, around 200 miles, and then from Edmonton out to Vancouver. On the other hand, the CPR sends grain west to Edmonton, south to Calgary and then along its line to Vancouver. For all of us who have followed the ins and outs of the Crow debate, the words of Mr. Justice Emmett Hall that "Train loads of grain are passing like ships in the night" will long be remembered.

Is this efficiency? No. Whom does it end up costing? The farmers, the producers and the taxpayers of the country, they pay for this inefficiency. Whom does it benefit? It benefits the railroads. Surely it is not too much to ask this House to agree to an amendment which would stop this illogical business as far as the taxpayers are concerned.

It raises some other interesting questions, questions that some of my colleagues have pointed out. For instance, if the railroads do lose money hauling statutory grains, why do they attempt to hold on to those grains as long as possible? I suspect the railroads are not losing money but making money hauling statutory grains. The Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin) made a very important point. He said that if this Bill passes the railroads will get a 20 per cent guaranteed return on investment. It will be even more in their vested interest to hold on to the grains as long as possible and to encourage the inefficiencies in the system as much as possible in order to get a greater reward for themselves. As I pointed out earlier, the farmers and the taxpayers are the ones who will end up paying the railroads even more.

What the amendment before us today will do is at least begin to cut out some of that. It will force the railroads to become more efficient and to act in a more co-operative manner. I do recognize that this runs counter to some of the philosophy in the free enterprise system. In the free enterprise system competition dictates that you have no truck or trade with your rival. CN should have nothing to do with CP and vice-versa. The problem is, as I have already mentioned, that

the consumers, the producers—the Canadian people—are the ones who get hurt.

The time has come to make the case that railroads in Canada should be treated like a public utility. We do not have two different power lines running parallel to each other. We do not have two different water mains running parallel to each other or two different telephone lines running parallel to each other—

Mr. Flis: That is not relevant.

Mr. de Jong: —because that does not make sense. It is recognized that ultimately the consumer of those services is the one who has to pay for their duplication.

The same case surely is made with our railways, which are so vital to the economic, social and cultural interests of Canada. The railroads should be considered as a public utility. Heaven knows, we have paid enough for them. The time has come to rationalize the system so that you do not have this insane duplication of services that we find time after time in our railroad system. At least the amendment before us moved by the Hon. Member for Vegreville will cut out some of that insane competition.

I was interested in the remarks some of our Conservative colleagues have made. They have been good remarks. When the Hon. Member for Vegreville introduced his amendment, he said that Bill C-155 as a whole was written as a very favourable mechanism to the railroads. The major beneficiary in the whole Bill is the railroads. He also said that the producers are the ones forgotten in the whole exercise. Indeed, I am happy to hear that Members of the Conservative Party are voicing those opinions. I think it is an accurate description and an accurate analysis of this Bill. I hope we will be receiving their support for some of the other amendments that we will be proposing that will make certain this Bill is of benefit to the producers and not to the railroads and their vested interests.

It is obvious from the few catcalls and comments from Members opposite that Government Members have not been convinced of the worthiness of Motion No. 33. I would suggest this necessitates more speakers by the Opposition to describe fully their arguments and thus penetrate the thinking of Members opposite. I urge some of our Conservative colleagues to make these points over and over again. Believe you me, gentlemen, it is necessary to repeat your points in order to convince Government Members across the way.

I invite more speakers from the Official Opposition to make their points and to make them forcefully. This amendment in Motion No. 33 is a good amendment, Mr. Speaker. For heaven's sake, Hon. Members, don't just sit there and not say anything about this good amendment. Stand up and make the case and help us to convince Government Members of the worthiness of your amendment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!