

Transportation

The feed grain issue is still unresolved in spite of dozens of investigations and the setting up of commissions to look into the problem. It follows that the question is asked, "How do we get into this sort of a mess?" Some ten years ago at a time when my constituents were busily going about producing new wealth for themselves and the government, a task force was set up on agriculture. It released its findings in 1970. That task force report called for a reduction by two thirds of the number of farming units in Canada by 1990, and a reduction in the country's farm acreage, some ten million acres. The Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) was part of the government that accepted those recommendations.

There were statements contained in that report such as that by 1980 more than 90 per cent of all Canadians will live in centres with a population of 10,000 or more; 80 per cent of all Canadians may be living in three metropolitan areas, etc. Along with all this went a general attitude of preparedness for rural to urban migration. The government accepted this task force report and took it for granted that this rural-urban migration was a good thing. The railways, having to plan years ahead, naturally took their cue from this report and from the government's position taken on the task force. They decided, quite rightly, that there was no future in prairie agriculture and they would have to devote their energies elsewhere in the country.

The task force on agriculture was followed by the infamous lift program, and this minister was responsible. This was a program where farmers were paid to take crop land out of production. We all know what happened. Within two years Canada was sold right out of grain. The cost to the farmers in western Canada can be calculated by a loss of hundreds of millions of dollars.

This lift program confirmed the railways' suspicions that the future was indeed bleak for prairie agriculture. They acted accordingly and reduced their railway effort in western Canada. In the absence of any commitment by the national government to support a viable western agriculture, there was no other choice for the railways. We just have to look to see how far our competitors in the United States have come in the last year. The U.S. made the commitment to agriculture that, as it ran down its natural resources, great efforts were to be diverted into production of food. Last year the United States increased its exports of grain by more than the Canadian total export figure. Last year 10,000 hopper cars went into the grain handling system. This year 20,000 are scheduled to go into it.

After the disaster of this LIFT program, the howls of the western farmers forced the government to reverse its decision. The first thing the minister did was to panic with a fire sale of feed barley. This was offered at Thunder Bay at 57 cents a bushel. This cost western farmers dearly. The minister then decided, for political reasons I suppose and because of its high visibility, to overhaul and revamp the prairie branch line rail system and the country elevator system. The real bottleneck which had always been at the Pacific seaboard was to remain as it was, with not one cent spent on it. Next we have a branch line study undertaken by Mr. Justice Emmett Hall who turned

in a report very well accepted by the public, but not what the minister wanted. So he headed it off with more studies, the Bryden report, the Prairie Rail Action Committee report, etc., and that is where we stand now.

Mr. Cliff McIsaac (Battleford-Kindersley): Mr. Speaker, I believe it was my friend, the hon. member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Neil), who earlier in the evening made the point that there was inadequate time to debate a very comprehensive, large and broad subject. I am sure that he shares my feeling that we would have been much better off using the time yesterday afternoon between four o'clock and 5.30 p.m. as government members sat in their desks waiting for my hon. friends opposite to come into the House.

Mr. Stevens: You are the one who fouled it up. You said 5.30 p.m.

Mr. Gillies: You set the time.

Mr. McIsaac: We might have used some of that time to debate this very important issue. I think the motion is an important one.

Mr. Stevens: You said 5.30 p.m. What are you complaining about?

Mr. McIsaac: I am not complaining. I am saying to hon. members opposite that we might have found some additional time yesterday that went to no real avail.

I am happy to be able to participate in this debate on the motion put by the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski). This afternoon I felt that the hon. member for Vegreville did not put his usual vim and vigour into his motion. I am not sure what that tells us. Perhaps my hon. friend is having difficulty speaking without a platform put forward by his party to help him in putting forward a case for transportation for western Canada and other parts of the country.

In listening to the minister and other speakers, but the minister primarily, I think he put the case for many of the major achievements of the government in the field of transportation. However, I think it is well worth reviewing the record of the government over the last five or six years. Compare some of that with the four or five-year period of the Tory government from 1958 to 1962. The latter part will not take too long because there were really only two achievements in that time. One was the establishment of the MacPherson royal commission which was established in 1959. In 1967 some of its recommendations were incorporated into the National Transportation Act. From that eight-year effort we saw some moves which covered their program.

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Producers in my part of the country and elsewhere will recall Tory transportation efforts and their lack of any concrete results in terms of remedying the problems which they have become expert about in the last couple of years.