

As a result of ignoring the western Canadian processing industry, the Minister has reduced the annual western livestock industry almost to the point of no return. Is it any wonder that the fortunes of this Government are at an all time low in western Canada? Antagonizing western Canadians, antagonizing and working at cross purposes with their economy and hindering instead of assisting them are sure ways to alienation, a process in which the Government has proved to be master over the years.

The payment that the Government proposes to the railway companies under this Bill will not benefit those people who were initially supposed to be the beneficiaries. Clause 55(2) of the Bill states that the Transport Minister can withhold any amount of money to the railways if, in the opinion of the Minister, the railways are not adequately investing in rail plant and equipment for moving grain and if the railways are not adequately maintaining the grain dependent branch lines. However, Mr. Speaker, if the railways claim that the money they receive from the Government and producers is still inadequate to justify such expenditures, they can simply let the rail system deteriorate and wait for the Government to come back again with ad hoc measures. This is in no way an adequate guarantee to producers that they are getting their money's worth for paying the increased freight rates. In other words, the railways can revert to their old ways at the expense of producers. It is, therefore, mandatory that a stronger commitment and guarantee by the Government and the railways is absolutely essential and necessary. Monitoring the performance of the railways is not enough.

● (1650)

If the past is any criterion, that is, the Government's plan to monitor railway performance on behalf of grain producers, the success of such a plan is in deep trouble.

In the Auditor General's annual Report of 1982, he criticized the Department of Transport in its financial and engineering rehabilitation program for the railways. The rehabilitation program, begun in 1977, called for the rehabilitation of 5,675 miles of rail by 1992 at a cost of \$1.6 billion. As well, Mr. Speaker, between 1971 and 1981 the Government entered into four agreements worth \$318 million to the railways, and the Auditor General found deficiencies including: deficiencies in construction costs charged by the railways; deficiencies in the assessment and disclosure of financial costs; and deficiencies in the development of construction standards and specifications.

There is no guarantee in this Bill that such gross neglect and such deficiencies will not occur again. Further, there is no guarantee against more hidden costs for the farmers in later years. There are many, many inequities in this Bill. Further, under this Bill grain farmers will be paying the full freight rate whenever grain volume exceeds \$31.1 million tonnes. This will present a disincentive for farmers to grow more grain and increase production.

Every major farm group and organization has protested and voiced strong objection to this, but as usual with this Government, these objections and protests have fallen on deaf ears.

Western Grain Transportation Act

On February 1, 1982, the Transport Minister said:

The progressive reduction of distortions in the western agricultural economy should yield significant benefits in terms of increasing processing, livestock production and crop diversification.

As far as this Bill is concerned, nothing could be further from the truth, and I wish the Minister would re-examine the statement and correct it. Of course, these words could have been written by somebody else for the Minister to use, the Minister being a layman in this matter with little or no agriculture experience. This, I might add, must apply to many of his staff who may be only theoretically versed in agriculture but do not have this knowledge backed up with practice and experience, a condition that applies to many other Government Departments as well, which is tragic, to say the least. This means that there is not enough common sense—it used to be called horse sense—in Governments today. Instead, we are overwhelmed with theorists, to the detriment and mismanagement of our country by all Governments across it. This Bill, Mr. Speaker, is a classic example of this problem and an example of a Bill in which an infusion of common sense is urgently needed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Order. The Hon. Member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski).

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised that I caught you off guard. I did speak on the original motion, and I now rise to speak in support of the amendment proposed by the Hon. Member for Regina East (Mr. Benjamin). I can only amplify that support because of the fact that a Minister of the Crown stood in his place today and moved what is tantamount to closure, closure on an issue that is fundamental and very important. I think in some instances the case has perhaps been overstated in terms of its importance as far as western Canada is concerned, but this is a very important and major issue to all of Canada from an economic and an agricultural point of view.

What is troubling in the parliamentary sense and in looking at the only democratic institution that we have left is that this is probably the twenty-fifth time—somewhere between 20 and 25 times—that closure has been moved in this session of Parliament. One has to ask the question, where are we going? Are we not meant in this place to debate important and fundamental issues such as the statutory freight rate? If we cannot debate an issue as fundamental and as important as the statutory Crowsnest Pass freight rate in this House for more than two or three days, then this institution is really being diluted and watered down into non-existence. One can only express one's dismay at the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin). He is a Minister who generated many accolades and generated some goodwill for his frankness and forthright approach in western Canada. But whatever goodwill the Minister generated over the past year or so with his actions here today has been flushed down the drain. There is no question about that. As a result, one can only voice one's anger and outrage by what is taking place here today.