

Government Orders

I felt it was important to demonstrate from what has happened in the House in terms of anti-democratic actions it is very unlikely the government will ever allow—

Mrs. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like to check what bill we are on. I thought we were talking about the wheat board.

I question the relevancy of the comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): As stated before, the rules of relevancy are very elastic. Members give themselves a fair amount of range but I ask members to be conscious of that.

Mr. Benoit: Mr. Speaker, I can understand the hon. member's wanting to keep this hidden. However, it is directly connected to the point which I am trying to make about the chances of farmers receiving from the government the right to take control of their own organization and to have the wheat board democratized.

I have to talk about the record of the government in that regard when I am evaluating those chances. I can understand members wanting me to keep quiet but I will not keep quiet on this.

Because of this record it is unlikely to happen and I am afraid I cannot give farmers much hope in their taking control of their organization.

This piece of legislation is a move in the right direction. This is the best piece of legislation I have seen from the government in the entire session. It is not a bad piece of legislation. I congratulate the government on it. It will be good for western Canadian farmers in the long run. It will be tough for some farmers now and we recognize that. There is some compensation to help them deal with that.

I congratulate the agriculture minister and the parliamentary secretary for this piece of legislation but we need a lot more and we need to allow farmers to take control of their organization very quickly through an elected board of directors.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I know there is some haste to bring the debate to a conclusion but this is a matter which is very relevant to my riding in west-central Saskatchewan. I will use a few minutes of the House's time to speak to Bill C-92, an act to amend the Canadian Wheat Board. It will begin to alter the grain transportation system subsequent to the elimination of the Crow benefit.

The purpose of the legislation is to change the pooling points on which the initial payments are based from Thunder Bay and Vancouver to other points in Canada designated by the governor in council. The new pooling points will reflect the actual transportation costs for each producer, or at least it will come closer to reflecting the actual transportation costs.

• (1915)

It should be noted that these changes to the pooling points and the abandonment of the Crow have been in the embryonic stage for a long time. Farmers across the prairies have known for some time that the transportation system would be changing and the Crow subsidy no longer would be in place. In fact, some of the politicians were the last ones to realize this, particularly politicians on the other side of the House.

It is hard to believe that it has actually been 10 years since the Canadian Wheat Board 85 proposal. As we have seen in the past two weeks, the government operates at the speed of a turtle until certain legislation needs to be passed and then the bills are rammed through with a sledgehammer with time allocation and closure.

Fortunately, there is enough support for this bill that the government has not felt it needed to move to censure the members and not allow them to speak to the bill.

The Canadian Wheat Board 85 proposal, seeing the general equivalency of the west coast and St. Lawrence ports in terms of sales returns, recommended the eastern pooling point be changed from Thunder Bay to St. Lawrence. However, under today's market conditions, the demand from Pacific rim far outstrips the demand from the Europeans. Therefore, an extra burden is placed on farmers in Manitoba and eastern Saskatchewan when it comes to paying the shipping costs in moving their grain.

The National Grain Bureau proposal of 1990 is the basis of Bill C-92. This is not, and I want to emphasize this, an initiative of the minister of agriculture. Under the National Grain Bureau proposal, producers would pay the transportation costs based on their proximity to certain markets. For example, a farmer close to the west coast would pay less freight than a farmer farther away if his grain was shipped to the west coast. This would be dependent on him shipping through the Canadian Wheat Board.

The goal is to end the cross subsidization of eastern farmers by western farmers. Under the Crow subsidy, transportation costs being pooled meant that a farmer in Lethbridge, for instance, would pay the same shipping costs to the west coast as a farmer from Brandon. The National Grains Bureau proposal added two catchment areas, Churchill and the United States, to the west and east coast points.

The changes in this legislation are definitely a step in the right direction. I do not think farmers have too many qualms about ending the cross subsidization of farmers. It would not be fair to ask farmers on the western prairies to continue subsidizing eastern farmers based on their location. Conversely, I really do not think that farmers in the east want to be subsidized.