

Western Grain Transportation Act

[English]

Mr. Waddell: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister which is more in the nature of a political question. Basically, the Government does not have any Members in western Canada; there are two in Manitoba but none in Saskatchewan or Alberta and these Provinces are going to be fundamentally affected by changes in the Crow rate. Does the Minister not think it is inappropriate for a Government that does not have any representation there to make fundamental changes in the nature of western Canada which will result from the change in the Crow rate?

I am not disputing with the Minister the fact that the Government does have the legal right to do that; of course it has. It is the Government of all of us and is elected as such.

Perhaps I can give an analogy. Suppose this Party or the Conservative Party were the Government with strong representation in western Canada but no Members in Quebec and we were to make some fundamental changes in the economy of Quebec against the wishes of Quebecers. Would that be politically proper? I do not think it would but I would like to ask the Minister to comment on it. Perhaps this is a question which has not been asked about the Crow.

Does the Minister think it is politically right that a Government with virtually no representation in western Canada should make fundamental changes to the economy of western Canada when those changes are opposed by the people there? If we were to do that in Quebec there would be a revolution.

Mr. Johnston: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mr. Waddell) is suggesting that a Government which might not be represented in a particular sector of the country should effectively abdicate its mandate to govern the country. That would be to say, I suppose, that if a Party were not to have representation, say, in northern Ontario, which is a very substantial part of Ontario, it could not take steps to improve the economy of that particular region.

This initiative has been the subject of consultation by my colleague the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin), who is in the House today, of a kind and to an extent that has perhaps never been seen before. In addition, when the Hon. Member for Vancouver-Kingsway says that this is politically a move which he questions, I would point out to him that the Liberal Party, which is the Government, had a very substantial representation from its membership throughout the country which represents the voice of many people in western Canada.

The issue was the subject of a very substantial resolution during the national policy convention which the Liberal Party holds on a regular basis, unlike some other Parties in the House, and that convention was fully supportive of the measures the Government is taking.

I reject out of hand any suggestion that the national Government of this country should abdicate its responsibilities because it is not represented in a particular region. I would suggest that the only way that a Party would never be represented in a region of the country is if it were to leave the

impression with Canadians that the problems of the people in western Canada are not our problems. But they very much are.

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Speaker, I note that the hon. gentleman neglected to mention that the Liberal Party in Saskatchewan Alberta and Manitoba—what is left of it—opposed this plan. It made that plain and it made it public. It wanted to keep the statutory freight rate for grain producers.

• (1130)

I would like to ask the Minister, believing in free enterprise as he does, if he considers it proper for a Government to take taxpayers' money and use it as capital for investment in any project, without there being eligible for some kind of return on that investment? In other words, money which has been put into Canadair and a few other projects is money over which Canadians have some ownership, control or some say, whereas in the case of the railways it is a straight gift. Would the Minister not agree that it would make sense for Canada—Mr. Speaker, I wish the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) would stop trying to prime the Minister with an answer, which will not be correct in any event. It shows a lack of courtesy on his part and it certainly indicates that his Cabinet colleague does not know a damned thing about this subject when it has to be whispered into his ear what to say.

Would the Minister not consider it more proper, in return for funds put up for capital, for Canada to take increased equity ownership in Canadian National for the value of that capital which they receive, and equity shares in Canadian Pacific Limited, in order to be eligible for any interest or dividends, or any return on that investment? Why just hand it out so that only Canadian Pacific Limited shareholders will receive the return on the investment made by the taxpayer?

Mr. Johnston: Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised at that question coming from the Hon. Member. Apart from his social and economic philosophy, I believe I have a great deal in common with some of the views which he expresses on occasion, but not in this area.

First of all, he suggests that we increase our equity in CN. We own 100 per cent of CN; I do not know how we could increase our equity in CN. If there are dividends paid out by CN, I know of no other recipient of those dividends than the Canadian Government. It may be in part a misunderstanding of the nature of a corporation and the activities it carries on which leads the Hon. Member to express the kind of philosophy which he is putting forward for review by us here today. There are many activities where the federal Government on behalf of the Canadian taxpayer elects to subsidize a particular private sector activity, and in such case we do have a very major return on that investment, Mr. Speaker, in increased jobs and in increased services to the Canadian public. But more importantly, what Hon. Members seem to forget is that the Canadian Government is a 50 per cent partner in every private sector corporation in this country through the fiscal system. That is how our fiscal system works. That is what its