

Department of Transport Act

I wonder if I could give some information with regard to the movement of grain during this season which is very much in our minds, that is from the middle of December 1955 up to the present time. I took the trouble this morning to get the latest information available. I am sure hon. members will be interested in knowing—this is by way of comparison—that between December 15, 1954 and April 20, 1955 the railways shipped from country points 63,011 cars, and between December 15, 1955 and April 20, 1956, despite the handicap of the weather conditions to which I alluded a moment ago and which I think are particularly well known to hon. members from the western and the maritime provinces, the railways shipped 81,546 cars. They shipped nearly 20,000 more cars this year than in the same period during the last crop year 1954-55.

Mr. Argue: May I ask a question at this point. Has the minister available figures for the last crop year, that is from August 1, 1954 down to the date he mentioned, and for the period August 1, 1955 down to the comparable date? In that way we would have a comparison for a larger part of the two crop years.

Mr. Marler: I have figures here dated April 24 which indicate that the cars loaded during the previous crop years were 185,069, whereas in the current year from August 1 the total was 174,770, a difference of a little more than 10,000 cars.

I do not want to deal at too great length with statistics, but first may I say that I am sure that hon. members opposite will understand fully that I make no pretensions whatever to being an expert either in the transportation of grain or on wheat and such similar topics as may be more familiar to hon. members from the western provinces. Looking at the matter impartially it does seem to me that what took place this year is practically exactly what has taken place in the past. I was most interested in having the opportunity the other day to look at a comparison of loadings at country points with shipments for export. This was presented to me in the form of a graph and I was amazed to find, although it is not really surprising, that the line representing export clearances is practically always parallel to the line shipments from country points. I hope I have made that clear. In other words, there is a direct relationship between country shipments and export clearances.

I am sure that that does not surprise anybody. But just as it does not surprise hon. members, surely it is not surprising either to note that when your export shipments

[Mr. Marler.]

drop there is a corresponding drop in your shipments from country points. I cannot help thinking that a great deal of what has been said on the subject of box cars, the difficulties of moving wheat and so on, are directly related to the volume of export shipments. When export shipments are higher the shipments from country points are correspondingly higher.

In considering the functions of the transport controller one must bear in mind that he is not the salesman of our wheat. It is his function to co-ordinate rail and water movements so that the wheat moves forward for export in an orderly fashion. I think I have enough objectivity and enough disinterestedness in looking at this question to say that I believe firmly that Mr. Milner has done an excellent job while he has been transport controller. I was sorry to hear the hon. member for Yorkton make some comments last night with regard to Mr. Milner's former occupation which it seemed to me really were not justified by Mr. Milner's record while he has been transport controller.

As hon. members know, he has been acting as transport controller, first of all under the regulations which existed before 1954 and more particularly under the act which we are now discussing since July 1, 1954. I think he has done an excellent job and I feel perfectly sure that at times when criticism is voiced rather generally in connection with conditions for which he is not responsible, he must feel greatly tempted to retire into fields where criticism is less plentiful and where commendation is more widely expressed.

Mr. Argue: Mr. Chairman, if the transport controller should be sensitive to criticism, as the minister has just now stated, I imagine that the cruellest blow which the transport controller has yet received was that delivered during the current session by the right hon. Minister of Trade and Commerce when he said that if there was a bottleneck in the whole grain picture it was in connection with box cars and transportation. The first prominent person that I know of having to do with grain in this country who alluded to the shortage of box cars, fictional shortage or otherwise, was the Minister of Trade and Commerce. Apparently when he saw that exports were going down he said, "Well, they would not be going down, at least not quite so far, if it were not for this shortage of box cars and this difficult situation in regard to transportation."

I listened most carefully to the Minister of Transport this afternoon and last evening and I have not heard him say what are the functions of the transport controller, what