

opportunity to present their views with regard to the necessity for the continuation of those branch lines.

That is the central part of our amendment. We make reference to the Canadian Transport Commission because we believe it could hold public hearings before branch lines are abandoned in order to give communities the opportunity to state whether they believe a railway's argument that a branch line is uneconomical is valid. As well, they could indicate to the Commission the extent to which the subsidy of truck transportation has contributed to the reduction of transportation on the branch line. This may then indicate to what extent the Government has actually subsidized the creation of a situation which it has then used to justify abandoning a branch line.

Citizens could document the increased costs in terms of road maintenance as a result of branch line abandonment. They could then argue whether the abandonment of a particular branch line would be a saving to the economy or a simple cost transfer from the railroad, which is under federal jurisdiction, to the roads, which are under provincial and municipal jurisdiction. Canadians already carry a heavy burden with their property taxes and it is unimaginable that the federal Government would subsidize something which would lead to increased property taxes for Canadians. If the Government wishes to do this, the people in those communities which are affected should have the opportunity to be heard since it is a simple principle of democracy that every citizen have the right to speak out on Government policies before they are implemented. This gives the Government the opportunity to reconsider its policies and possibly abandon them.

I believe our motion is reasonable. If trucking subsidies are to take place, it should only be in those areas where there are no branch lines. The subsidization of trucking on branch lines is the same as subsidizing a reduction of branch line use, which will provide the justification for the abandonment of that branch line. If the Government decides to permit the subsidies, it must allow the local people who will be affected by this drastic change in policy to voice their opinion so the Government can reconsider its action and withdraw its policy.

Mr. Dave Nickerson (Western Arctic): Mr. Speaker, when I perused the newspaper this morning, I found that the Conservative Party stood at an unprecedented 62 per cent in the polls and that the NDP, at the same time, stood at an unprecedented low of 14 per cent. I wondered why this had happened, but now, after having listened to the speeches by the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-St. James (Mr. Keeper) and the Hon. Member for Prince Albert (Mr. Hovdebo), I know the reason full well. The people of Canada know full well why they stand so lowly in the polls.

We on this side of the House have had one aim in mind when dealing with western grain transportation. That is to secure the lowest cost and most effective system to benefit the farmers. Just think what would happen if this amendment were to carry. Let us consider a branch line which services two or three elevators. Suppose that the culvert is washed out and that line is inoperable until repairs can be made. In our view, it

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should be possible for the farmer to have his grain trucked to another elevator without having to bear the full cost that he would entail if the Senior Grain Transportation Commissioner had not had the power available to him which we propose. This would be impossible if what the gentlemen to my left are saying was accepted.

I wanted to make a very brief presentation in order to demonstrate that what they are saying is nonsense and that the amendment does not make sense. If they continue in this vein they will not stand at 14 per cent in the polls, they will stand at 4 per cent.

● (1250)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Is the House ready for the question?

Mr. Evans: Question.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): Question.

Mr. Keeper: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Given the extraordinarily brief presentation, would the Hon. Member for Western Arctic (Mr. Nickerson) entertain a question?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Does the Hon. Member for Western Arctic (Mr. Nickerson) wish to entertain a question?

Mr. Nickerson: I certainly would, Mr. Speaker, but I think it would be necessary for you to get the consent of the House for the Member to ask his question because it is not permitted under the rules governing report stage.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): I should perhaps explain to the Hon. Member that he has not exhausted his full ten minutes. Within that time span he can, if he wishes, receive a question, but that is his decision.

Mr. Nickerson: Mr. Speaker, I would be very pleased if I am allowed by the rules to receive a question from the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-St. James.

Mr. Keeper: I thank the Hon. Member for having the courage to submit to a question, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Keeper: I noted the Hon. Member was mesmerized by today's Gallup poll. I took note of the fact that his speech was so short that it is facilitating the passage of the Crow Bill through the House. Is the Hon. Member more concerned with fleeting popularity than with the actual economic circumstances of the prairie farmers?

Mr. Kempling: That is a dumb question.

Mr. Fisher: And the answer is yes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): In a sense, even though questions are allowed, they must be relevant to the amendment. The extraneous matter brought in by the Hon. Member