

Supply

lines, thus fulfilling their obligation to Canada. It is time the government took a strong stand with the railway companies. Instead, the government protects the railways. For a change, let us protect the farmers.

The railways are making a fool of the government. Every winter and spring they allow no traffic on many branch lines because in the winter they say snow creates problems and in the spring they say their roadbeds are too soft to stand traffic. Because of this, some lines are closed for four to six months of the year. Then they appear before the transport committee and say that their tonnage is away down on such a line and that it should be permanently closed. The railways cannot deny this. At the present time, in the riding of Marquette, this is the situation in respect of some lines. This winter, because of the light snowfall in Manitoba, snow is no problem; the roadbeds are frozen solid and can handle most trains. Yet we see no trains using these lines. The government should demand from the railways action in respect of these lines.

I have knowledge of cases where either the Manitoba pool or the United Grain Growers wish to improve present grain elevator facilities and even build new ones. However, construction is delayed for one of two reasons. Either the railways will not guarantee how long they will service the line, or the proposed cost of putting a spur line into the elevator is not realistic. This is just a charade on the part of the railways, and unfortunately the farmer is the loser.

During the last few years the government has given the impression that it wants only 50 delivery points for grain in all of western Canada. I maintain that the purchase of these hopper cars is only the first step in this program. The end result will be long hauls for many farmers. The government should announce its intentions. It should announce a program now, as we urged last session, under which farmers would be paid for storage of farm stored grain. Despite what some experts say, Canada must have large supplies of grain on hand if it is to survive in world markets.

The government should also announce a program to assist farmers who have extremely long hauls to elevators. In areas where there is good and sound justification for the closing of a delivery point—and these are few—farmers should be compensated if the result is that they will have to haul their grain great distances.

One fear expressed by many farmers about the purchase of hopper cars is, who will pay for the maintenance of these cars? Will it be the railways, or the government, or will this expense come out of the farmers' Wheat Board account? They also wonder whether the government has received any assurance that the railways will use these hopper cars for grain only, or whether they will be used for other commodities. It is my understanding that the CPR and CNR presently are wrecking 2,000 boxcars. What is the reason for this? Could these cars not be kept to meet any emergency movement of grain?

In closing, let me again tell the government that it is time it got tough with the CPR and the CNR. If the purchase of these hopper cars is to be truly effective, the railways must upgrade their present tracks so all areas of the west will benefit. For a change, the farmer rather than the railways should be protected.

[Mr. Stewart (Marquette).]

• (1540)

Mr. Lang: Mr. Chairman, I must deal with a number of issues which have been raised this afternoon. A number of the issues on the subject of hopper cars and the rail transportation system were gone over in the very lengthy debate we had on the first item in this schedule when members of the official opposition and members of the NDP spoke one after the other, presumably in competition for the filibustering role.

Mr. Stanfield: Do you want to get your estimates passed?

Mr. Lang: The question is, who pays the price? I see the Leader of the Opposition is trying to blackmail me by threatening not to pass the estimates, after two or three days' discussion by members of these two parties have come to naught. I do have to deal with some of the matters which have been raised. I would appreciate it if the Leader of the Opposition would not mind my attempting to deal with issues which are of key interest to prairie farmers, namely, the movement, handling and transportation of grain.

The item before us deals with the purchase of hopper cars. One or two hon. members, including the hon. member for Marquette who has just finished speaking, asked what benefit this has been to farmers. We have also been asked why this was not done earlier. I am not quite sure how they would like us to proceed on this matter. Should we not have done it at all, or should we have done it earlier? We have the dilemma that we must have been right or wrong or right too late. The interesting point, of course, which hon. members forget is that it was only when we had gone into the feed grain market in a big way—something that had never happened before—that we began to move volumes of grain which were likely to test the capacity of our delivery system in a regular fashion.

Hon. members may think that we should have a delivery system which is at all times ready to handle any volume of grain which we may have to move at any particular point in time. That is not sound economics, which I hope they will appreciate. You do not build a system to handle two billion bushels of grain if chances are that once in 150 years you might get to that kind of volume. You build for the realities, for the likelihoods.

We had a system which we were told could stretch itself and move 700 million bushels of export grain, and we stretched it to that limit. When we wanted to get exports up to 800 million bushels of grain, we ensured that additional facilities were there in order to move to that limit. We were getting to the point where I and the government could see that if the Wheat Board chose to move a particular volume of wheat and barley into market in the coming crop year, we might have some question about the ability of the existing system as it was operating to handle the grain. Notice those words: the existing system as it was operating and its ability to handle the grain.

The problem was that with the rail equipment in use, and with the turnaround formula for that equipment, there could be some finite limits put upon the volume of grain which could be handled, given the problems of