

Transportation

opportunity for hon. members to discuss it in committee.

Mr. Pickersgill: It would be my anticipation, it would be my belief, approaching certainty, that unless there were some profound change in Canada any assistance offered to the railways by this parliament for the carriage of grain would be debated at length at every stage and in every possible form.

• (6:30 p.m.)

The Deputy Chairman: Shall clause 50 as amended carry?

Mr. Churchill: Mr. Chairman, I do not like to consume the time of the committee but I wish to save the situation for a member who is on his way here now, flying on wings. I am not sure that the minister answered my question as to why a three year period was selected as the interval before an investigation should be made of the rates on the transport of grain. Is there any particular reason why it should be three years rather than five years?

I do not think the controversy over Crowsnest pass rates should come up within such a short interval as three years because those rates were investigated by the MacPherson commission and I assume they were dealt with at some length when this bill was before the standing committee. We are now discussing the subject again. The bill provides that the rates shall come up for discussion at intervals of three years, which may perpetuate a state of controversy over a matter that should not be considered for a longer period of time.

Ten years ago this summer the problem of wheat, which was the biggest political problem at that time, rested in part on my shoulders. At that time we had a 730 million bushel surplus, with a 500 million bushel crop expected, and a surplus of soft wheat in the province of Ontario. Our exports for 1957-58 amounted to 320 million bushels. I had forecast that we would export 300 million bushels and I recall being laughed at across the country as an inexperienced, new minister who did not understand the grain trade. We all have such experiences. In fact our exports amounted to 320 million bushels. Those days are now long past.

I also recall when I was making an intensive study of the grain trade that I advanced the proposition that the practice of getting unduly alarmed over that trade each year was unsound, and that it should be looked at over a ten-year period. In my studies I noticed the rise and fall in the world demand for wheat,

[Mr. Nasserden.]

and that over a ten year period the problem tended to solve itself. That has been our experience from 1957 to 1967.

In 1957 nobody could see exports of wheat exceeding 300 million bushels, yet over the last few years we have talked gaily about exporting 500 million bushels. We have increased our acreage under wheat and our crops are larger. We are not concerned about exporting it in the way that we were concerned ten years ago. The reason I mention these facts is that we are incorporating a clause in this bill which says that within three years the Crowsnest pass rates will come up for review.

Mr. Pickersgill: I think the hon. gentleman is misinterpreting the bill. The rates are not going to be up for review. There is going to be no review of the rates. It is just a question of the remuneration to the railways at those rates.

Mr. Churchill: I have not expressed myself as well as the minister has. There is to be no review of the rates. They are to remain static as set in the statute, and assistance may be given to the railways if they prove the rates are uneconomic.

My point is that what has been a long and sustained attack on the Crowsnest pass rates will be revived much too frequently, if this issue is reviewed three years after the coming into force of this legislation. I only hope that the entire preceding ten-year period will be looked at, because it may be found that the railways have made a very substantial profit, due to the quantity of grain they have shipped over the last several years.

With respect to the years 1957, 1958 and 1959, when our exports hovered around the 300 million bushel mark, the railways possibly could have argued, and convinced the MacPherson commission, that the rates were uneconomic. But as I say, I hope the figures for the last several years will be taken into account because the export picture vastly improved during those years.

If the situation were reviewed once in ten years, starting with 1967 as the base year, I think this would be much more satisfactory. The railways might not look at it that way, but my point is that the grain trade should be looked at over a period such as ten years. This would prevent the railways simply picking out a bad year and saying, "This is uneconomic and we need to have financial assistance." If the railways have been making a pile of money in years when we are exporting 500