

Adjournment Debate

TRANSPORT—SHORTAGE OF RAILWAY CARS TO MOVE GRAIN AND LUMBER—RETURN OF CANADIAN CARS FROM UNITED STATES—REPAIR OF ROLLING STOCK

Mr. Bill Knight (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, on the day when we were asking questions in this House relating to the severe and critical problems affecting transportation in Canada, I directed a number of questions to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand), to which I feel I was given inadequate answers. I therefore hope that tonight the parliamentary secretary will answer some of the questions relating to problems in the movement of grain in the prairie regions.

According to the president of the National Farmers Union, we stand to lose \$603 million by the end of the current crop year. According to my own figuring, we stand to lose in the neighbourhood of half a billion dollars. Regardless of which figure we take, in the one year when prices for our commodities are highest on the international market we stand to lose most because of difficulties with our transportation system.

Part of our difficulty stems from the fact that as of February 22 this year there were 15,500 Canadian railway boxcars in the United States and 8,000 American boxcars in Canada. That is, there were twice as many Canadian boxcars in the United States as American boxcars in Canada. That being so, I asked the minister if he could advise the House what action would be taken to bring back those cars so they might be used for moving our commodities. Secondly, I asked the minister if the government was paying \$3.43 million toward half the cost of repairing 2,400 boxcars used by the railways to move grain.

The fact was that as of February 22, 7,400 boxcars of our railway system needed to be repaired. The question I asked the minister, which was not answered, was what commitment had the railways in this country made to fix and repair the other 5,000 boxcars because at this point in time we are at least 11,000 cars short of requirements for moving our product to the international market? For example, consider what has happened at the port of Prince Rupert, where only 320 cars were unloaded this February, compared with 1,660 cars unloaded in February of last year.

The minister spoke of establishing a boxcar monitor, or a monitoring agent. He did not speak of a boxcar allocator, as proposed by the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) and myself. Apparently he will know where in the country the boxcars are. That, of course, is a typically Liberal position. He will know where they are, but will not do anything to put them where they should be. I want the parliamentary secretary to tell us what powers will be given to this monitor or monitoring agent to make sure that these cars are in position to move our commodities.

The questions I directed to the minister about the difficult situation we face were as follows: First, what is being done to get back into our transportation system the Canadian box-cars presently being used in the United States? Second, what commitment have the railways made to repair and put in service the other 5,000 cars which need to be repaired? Third, what power will the so-called monitoring agent be given to force the railways to use these

[Mr. Reid.]

cars as he sees fit for the movement of our products? Apparently his monitoring will tell him where the boxcars are. Mr. Speaker, that is not one bit different from what CN and CP have been doing all along. They know the location of the cars. They monitor that. However, they do not do anything about ensuring they are moving basic commodities to the international market. If there is going to be any monitoring, it has to be through an agent who has power to allocate.

● (2140)

Being a westerner, and having relatives in my area, I know the hon. member for St. Boniface (Mr. Guay) will want to move their grain. I look forward with interest to his response.

Mr. Joseph-Philippe Guay (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, the number of Canadian railcars in the United States is always of great concern to both the railways and the federal government. However, the particular number of cars in the U.S. per se is not of real significance. What is of more concern is the speed at which these cars are returned to Canada once unloaded. Obviously, the greater the number of cars going to the U.S., the better our trade position with that country. We are not in disagreement with the figures the hon. member has stated. We would like, however, to offer a few words of explanation.

Canadian cars have a longer haul in the U.S. than U.S. cars have in Canada. This is due to the type of products hauled and the geography of the country. We tend to ship raw materials to points deep in the United States. The U.S. ship manufactured goods to the population centres along the border. In addition, the numbers of cars in the U.S. tends to increase according to the various business cycles. For instance, there was in February a marked demand for lumber in the U.S. The number of Canadian cars in the U.S. increased as a result, and this continued until some of these cars started to come back. During the past week the number of cars in the United States has decreased. This reflects the lumber cars now returning.

It should also be pointed out that 1974 is no worse than 1973 with respect to Canadian cars in the U.S. We are taking action, nonetheless. The railways have since January taken measures to expedite the return of cars to Canada. They have, for instance, requested an order from the American Association of Railways to ensure that United States railways return Canadian cars as rapidly as possible. There is a possible penalty if U.S. railways are found in fault.

I am sure the hon. member is not listening to the answer he has requested, but he can read it in *Hansard* tomorrow. In addition, the Canadian railways have very recently written to the presidents of major United States railways to request their co-operation in returning cars to Canada. This has had a significant impact on the reduction of Canadian cars in the U.S.

With regard to the hon. member's last question pertaining to repairs, this is being done at the present time through the co-operation of Canadian National Railways.