

They went on to put on as their third initiate the "British Connection. A determined opposition to everything calculated to weaken the tie binding us to the Mother Country".

As you look at those headings you have to think of how far the Conservative Party has wandered today. I must say that Sir John A., resting as he no doubt is, and watching the proceedings here, is probably twisting and turning with anguish as he sees what has happened to his Party.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: I used that this morning and it was a lot funnier.

Mr. Deans: Let me read what the claim was in those days and you will be able to see quite clearly why I contend that this particular amendment is an essential part of any redefinition of the agreement between the Government of Canada and the railroads of Canada in terms of how they will serve the economic needs.

On page 15 of that book it says:

The Canadian Pacific Railway

The Opposition—

The Opposition in those days, of course, were the Liberals.

—describe the contract entered into with the Canadian Pacific Railway Company to construct the Pacific Railway as the "Giant among Swindles," and as "the most disastrous public contract" and "the greatest railway swindle of the 19th century."

I want to stop at this point because—

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Agreed.

Mr. Deans: —their opposition was clearly misguided. That can happen. I want to suggest that just as their opposition was misguided then their opposition to what we are proposing now is equally misguided. Just as the opposition to the development of the railroad system back in the late 1800s was a misguided opposition, their opposition to our demand that the railroads be clearly accountable publicly for the expenditures that they undertake using public funds is misguided today, as it was in those days.

The Conservative brochure goes on to defend their position. They say:

At that time both parties agreed that it should be built by a company, aided by subsidies of land and money—

And this is the catch.

—but so as not to increase the burden of taxation.

In our presentation we suggested that there was a clear betrayal of the original agreement. The railroads had been given, in return for their commitment to build what was deemed at that time, and undoubtedly was in the national interest, a link between the West and the central and eastern parts of Canada, substantial amounts of capital by way of grants, and they were given substantial numbers of acres of land by way of outright deed. But they were not to be given public subsidy out of the tax dollars. What we are saying today is consistent with that particular principle.

Western Grain Transportation Act

We are saying that if the railroads are to be provided with additional funds, as they have been over the last number of years in order to enable them to live up to their commitment, surely it is not too much to expect that in return for those funds they should be prepared to provide an accurate dollar accounting of how the funds are spent.

I heard the Conservatives moaning and groaning over the course of the last four hours about the inconsistency of our position.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Hear, hear! Right on.

Mr. Deans: They say with some degree of glee "hear, hear".

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Hear, hear, with a hell of a lot of glee.

Mr. Deans: All I can assume is that that particular response is out of ignorance. Quite frankly, if they were to be true to the original tenets of the Party they belong to, they would appreciate that those people who entered into this agreement in the first place quite clearly entered into it with an understanding that there would be no public funds made available on an ongoing basis out of taxation.

Since that point in time no doubt a number of changes have taken place. The one thing that is reasonable to ask is an accounting of how the money is going to be spent. I cannot understand why we cannot gain the support of the House of Commons on a matter such as this. I hear Conservative Members rising one after the other and speaking about the right of the company to maintain its secrecy, to maintain the confidentiality of its affairs. Mr. Speaker, confidentiality has a place, but there is no place for confidentiality if there is the involvement of public expenditures.

• (2200)

I can see that you are on the edge of your seat, Mr. Speaker, and you probably want to make a speech in support of my position. I simply want to ask Members of the House to consider this carefully. I say to the Tories, do not leave your roots; hang in there; you were right in the first place. I say to the Liberals, you were wrong in the beginning; you are wrong again; hear what we have to say.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, after such a forceful presentation on such an important position one would not want to make a judgment without having slept on the topic. In light of that very sound and sober advice that we need to cogitate, reflect and assess with the proper degree of sobriety and clearheadedness that such an amendment requires, I wonder if the House would like to consider the means by which we could expedite our business so that Members of the Opposition could allow me to give this the consideration they so devoutly wish.

I should like to respond to the concerns they have expressed. They may want to spend at least tomorrow's proceedings examining some of the amendments that were brought forward and placed on the Order Paper today that deal with the fundamental issue of ability to pay. I wonder if we could gain