

*Transportation*

River bridge was washed out. That was a disaster for the port of Vancouver as the main line of the Canadian National uses the bridge. For the three weeks that it was out of use, the port of Vancouver set a record for unloads, so it can be done if proper leadership is given.

The hon. member for Fort William (Mr. McRae) boasted about the great port of Thunder Bay. I should like to remind him that grain moving through Vancouver commands a 50-cent per bushel premium over Thunder Bay. It should be noted that of all ports, the prairie port of Churchill is by far the cheapest route for the movement of western grain to markets in Europe.

I should like to deal with part (3) of the motion, Mr. Speaker, which reads as follows:

That this House condemns the failure of the Minister of Transport to deal adequately with transportation matters in this country and, specifically, his failure:

(3) to deal adequately with grain movement, resulting in losses of hundreds of millions of dollars to producers and to the Canadian economy.

After a good many years with the minister in charge, it seems that the chickens have come home to roost.

I should like to examine the present system as it stands after the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money for subsidies, equipment and upgrading. During the tenure of the minister the 30,000 grain carrying cars decreased to the present 20,000, including the 8,000 government hoppers. Last year, because of inability to deliver, grain producers lost, in sales and deferred sales, which are the same thing, \$500 million. It will be much the same this year. The minister was bragging about unloads at Vancouver this year. The latest figures I was able to get from the Canadian Grain Commission show that on February 14, 293 cars were unloaded. Mr. Speaker, 700 should have been unloaded. On February 15, 123 cars were unloaded, and on February 16, 258 were unloaded. The capability of the port is 700 cars, Mr. Speaker. There is no need to mention, either, that demurrage charges reached record amounts last year.

One of the great tragedies of the situation is that we are delivering on deferred contracts at the old price and are not able to take advantage of the current \$5 per bushel price asking at Vancouver. This adds up to some \$4,000 for every farmer in western Canada. That is more than was indicated by the hon. member for Lisgar because I have added the old low price at which we are delivering the grain. A good case could be made that this is a deliberate attempt to hold down the grain economy of western Canada.

Today, 12 ships were waiting at Vancouver, and six other ones loading, while there are unused facilities at the port for bulk handling, and unused capacity in the interior of the country with government elevators not working to capacity.

We still have the unresolved Crow rate issue with tax money still pouring into the railroads and no over-all plan or understanding, and certainly no commitment from the railways for satisfactory service. To top it all off we now read in the paper about secret meetings taking place in western Canada to try to resolve this contentious Crow rate issue.

● (2130)

The Canadian Wheat Board had been forced into buying, with farmers' money, a good number of hopper cars. I would like to read into the record what a respected grain company, James Richardson and Sons, Limited, say in the February 15, 1979, grain letter. This indicates no leadership at all by the government or by the minister in this area. The second paragraph of this letter reads:

The Wheat Board has again taken the bull by the horns on the subject of hopper cars.

Further on in the paragraph it is mentioned there will be a requirement of:

—an additional 10,000 hopper cars over the next few years. The Board claims that unless these additions are made to the hopper car fleet, exports could decline by about one million tonnes per year resulting in a possible loss to prairie producers and the western economy of 4.2 billion dollars by 1985.

The letter also says:

Whatever the outcome, it is difficult to fault the Board for trying to take some decisive action or a first step in tackling the monumental grain handling problem.

Producer groups are now seeking a court injunction to stop the use of producers' money for these hopper cars. This is not the first time that producers have had to go to court to force this minister to act legally. I think we can all remember the hold up of the temporary Wheat Reserves Act of some years ago. Japan, one of our best customers, has put Canada on trial for the next 12 months because of the unacceptable delays in delivery of wheat through Vancouver.

We now have a Prairie Rail Action Committee report which is described as offensive and insulting by the largest grain handling company we have. This report only adds to the confusion in western Canada. In my area there is a line called the Dun Elm subdivision from Player to Simmie. The line is contingent at the present time upon a trucking subsidy and a road subsidy for its retention. It is so complicated and balled up that it is impossible for anyone in the district to understand it.

As an indication of the desperate situation facing many grain producers, I will mention just one producer car which was loaded on January 31, 1979, at Marquette, Manitoba, the mainline of the CPR. The car was still there yesterday, which was February 24. The number, if anyone is interested, is CPWX600413. This is a heartbreaker for the farmer involved who urgently needs the cash.

There is another problem coming up in the spring of 1979, and that is a labour problem in Vancouver with a work slowdown by the grain handlers union. With no overtime being worked by the grain handlers, it can take up to 18 hours to clean one car of rapeseed. Certainly the minister has not been taking any initiative in this area. It is interesting that the chief commissioner for the Canadian Wheat Board considered this so serious that he went to Vancouver and met with union representatives. We have customers waiting at the seaboard, unused capacity in the system, producers' bins full, and financial loss to the farmers. All of this just boggles the mind. We have no understanding of where it will all end.