

Western Grain Transportation Act

Mr. Nystrom: If they so choose, they will be able to charge higher rates along some of the branch lines, on some lines which do not ship as much grain or in those smaller towns which have smaller farms. This will mean that the railway will dictate social policy and could decide which towns or elevators will be closed. They could decide which farmers will be forced off the land as a result of charging a higher rate per bushel or tonne on line A or line B.

This could ultimately promote the greater centralization of agriculture on the Prairies. As Hon. Members are aware, there is presently a very decentralized economic system on the Prairies in which there is an elevator in every town and village along with Wheat Pools and other co-operative organizations. That could all end with the passage of legislation such as this.

I know that some Members across the way like to visualize huge inland terminals and the trucking of grain within a much more centralized economy in the Prairies. That is very alien and goes against the wishes of the overwhelming majority of people in prairie Canada.

The other point I wish to make is that this Bill will continue over time to give billions of dollars to the railways in this country. Historically, the CPR has been the greatest recipient of public welfare of any institution in Canada. It is the biggest welfare bum this country has ever seen.

An Hon. Member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nystrom: Do not tell me there is still a Conservative from the West who defends the CPR.

When one looks at the statistics, one finds that when the figures are adjusted in terms of 1982 dollars, the value of public aid to the CPR totals some \$13.5 billion. In return for that tremendous give-away to the CPR Canadian taxpayers have not received a single stock in equity or percentage. They have simply been given this tremendous gift. They were handed money to buy their hopper cars, to buy rail lines or improve their services. In the late 1880s much rail equipment was given to the CPR along with mineral rights and vast amounts of land. This was given to them free of charge in return for providing a service to the farmers. The farmers will now be asked to pay the full service for the shipment of their grain, but nowhere in the Bill—

Mr. Pepin: That is not true.

Mr. Nystrom: The Minister can reply after my speech, if he wishes. There was a bargain struck many years ago and the CPR received its land, mineral rights and equipment in return for hauling the grain for the farmers. This Bill will end the Crow rate for the farmers but it will not recover for the people of Canada all the equipment, land and mineral rights that were given to the CPR. In 1917, at the time of the royal commission, that was worth some \$279 million. When it is adjusted to 1982 dollars, it is worth \$8.3 billion. Under this Bill, the people of Canada will not recoup that \$8.3 billion from the CPR.

I see that you are rising, Mr. Speaker. I wish I had much more time because ten minutes is insufficient to put forward the case for the people of the Prairies. I think it is an utter disgrace because this debate is on the most important issue facing the Prairies.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I regret to interrupt the Hon. Member but he has had 11 minutes.

Mr. Gus Mitges (Grey-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the opportunity to say a few words on Bill C-155, the Western Grain Transportation Act. It is an Act which, if passed, will detrimentally change the whole face of grain transportation in Canada. Although this Bill will perhaps not have a marked effect in my riding of Grey-Simcoe in Ontario, it does represent an inequity that cannot be ignored or swept under the carpet and out of sight and mind. Further, to bring closure on this Bill is another monstrous inequity that will not go unnoticed by Canadians.

Since the announcement by the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) regarding this Bill, the country has moved further away from a consensus on changing the Crow rate. Whatever general feelings or consensus may have existed before in the West has now virtually disappeared.

When the Minister of Transport first announced the one-man Gilson task force, which was empowered to consult with farm groups and the railways regarding the Crow rate, his primary incentive to encourage farmers to participate in this venture was the promise that there would be rail performance guarantees to producers in exchange for increasing the freight rate to move grain. However, Bill C-155 proves to be a sham. There is no railway performance guarantees for the first three years. Furthermore, any sanctions on the railways will only be tallied, not levied. In other words, as far as I can see, the agreement will not have the necessary force to make such action mandatory.

In addition, there is no provision in the Act that Parliament will approve the regulations related to railway performance guarantees. In other words, the railways will get a free ride for three years. The bias of the Government is obviously in favour of the railways. Again, as a result of this bias, whatever general feelings or consensus existed in the West has disappeared.

The modification to the Bill to make all payments to the railways instead of providing for a fifty-fifty split in payments to the railways and producers has left nothing for the western processing industry. In fact, the disparity that exists between raw and finished products has greatly increased. This has left the livestock producers all across the West bitter, upset and very angry. My colleague, the Hon. Member for Wetaskiwin (Mr. Schellenberger), has already outlined with great clarity the devastating negative effects which this Bill will have on western hog and cattle producers. The truth is that the disparity that exists between raw and finished products will increase instead of decrease.