

which to study the Bill and to reach a consensus on the merits of the proposal. I will vote, therefore, in favour of the amendment which is designed to postpone consideration of this Bill for six months.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Speaker, since it is the Hon. Member's maiden speech, which we were all glad to hear, and in accordance with the tradition of the House when Members make their maiden speeches, I am sure there would be unanimous consent for him to continue his remarks if he wished to do so.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): It is the Hon. Member's privilege to seek extended time. I gather he is not making that request at this time.

Mr. Douglas Roche (Edmonton South): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating the Hon. Member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Clark) on his maiden speech. It was an outstanding effort of bringing to this House the very legitimate concerns of the electors who enabled him to enter this House because of their desire, first of all, that a rotten Government be replaced by a Party which is capable of bringing to this House Members such as the Hon. Member who has just spoken, to represent the concerns of their constituents, particularly in the area of the Crow rate that is of such crucial importance to western Canada. I am very pleased to pay my respects to the new Member and on behalf of my colleagues to welcome him formally here after his first speech.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Roche: It may not surprise you, Mr. Speaker, that an urban Member of Parliament is now on his feet in the House. While my good friend, the Hon. Member for Elgin (Mr. Wise), will recognize that my participation in the agricultural work of this House has not been particularly notable, there is a very real reason why an urban Member enters this debate. It is because what we are discussing here today on the Crow rate is of interest not only to the agricultural experts in this House and rural Members such as we have just heard, but it is central to the very life of western Canada, including the urban Members of this House.

This debate is really only beginning. We are representing here the viewpoint of western Canada. Other Members are bringing to the House viewpoints from other parts of Canada. It is a national issue. I believe it is absolutely correct to note, as the new Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, Mr. Brian Mulroney, made clear, that changing the Crow rate is akin to changing language legislation in Quebec. It is of the same dimension. That is why this Bill should not be rushed through Parliament. Careful deliberation and thought are necessary. I believe, with the new Leader of our Party, that productivity must be improved in Canada and, since agriculture is the only bright light in the Canadian economy, farmers should not be penalized under this Bill.

I want, with others, to draw the attention of the Government to the speech made by the Hon. Member for Vegreville (Mr.

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Mazankowski) who brought out his 14-point critique on this Bill on May 12 last. At that time he put forward a promising compromise that is at least one way for us to approach the extreme difficulties that the Bill presents. That compromise would allow the producer to decide if he wants the Crow benefit personally as opposed to having it paid directly to the railways. Such freedom of choice would give the producer the opportunity to affect the development of the grain-handling system, freeing the market to create and maximize efficiency. It would put decision making in the hands of the farmers themselves rather than having Government and the railways telling farmers what is good for them.

In this regard Bill C-155 is particularly lacking. Despite giving the railways what will amount to an extraordinary 1,000 per cent increase in freight rates by 1990, it nonetheless does not guarantee an efficient, cost-effective, and reliable grain transportation system.

In the time available for this part of the debate, I cannot deal with my many concerns and objections. Let me just concentrate on a couple of points. Perhaps I will have an opportunity at another stage of the debate to elaborate on my concerns.

The Government's initiative on changing the Crow does not give western Canada the opportunity for economic diversification which our vulnerable, resource dominated economy so badly needs, most directly in the realms of livestock and agricultural processing. According to the Minister's own figures, this Bill will further distort existing anomalies in freight rates, costing \$1 billion in livestock production and an additional \$350 million in processing activity. Moreover, by removing the statutory rates the agricultural sector will be denied a much needed factor of stability in an economic sphere which has been plagued by wild fluctuations in prices.

In a very real sense, these statutory rates for the shipment of western grain have been a key trade-off of Confederation, and that is the centrepiece of the positions we are presenting here. This has been a counter balance to the protection extended to industrial based central Canada. This buffered western Canada against harsh and often unfair international competition. Australian farmers pay less than 50 per cent of the cost of shipping their produce. Argentina gives free rail transport for grain. Wheat farmers in the EEC get a direct subsidy of \$2.53 per bushel. Even our neighbouring farmers in the United States receive similarly large subsidies.

I call to the attention of the House what the Hon. Member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers) recently pointed out, that the western producer must not be impeded, particularly in pursuing exports to the enlarging markets throughout the whole developing world. That will be a tremendous potential market, and to penalize Canadian farmers by not allowing them to reach that market does not make sense, as my colleague has said. Mr. Speaker, the West is not asking for some sort of special concession; it is simply seeking the capacity to compete on equal terms with the rest of the world, knowing full well that international trade is Canada's lifeblood.