

We are dealing here with Motions Nos. 50, 52 and 53. Two of those motions were put forward by the Hon. Member for Regina West and Motion No. 52 was put forward by the Hon. Member for Portage-Marquette (Mr. Mayer). I think it is very important to realize that we are talking about accountability of the railways. We are talking about information that is submitted to the general public, to the farmers and to everyone involved with increases in freight rates.

I do not know how the Hon. Member for Regina West intends to interpret the issue, but what we are dealing with here in regard to rate increases does not fall under the category of information, nor does it fall under the category of accountability, which is really the crux of the whole situation. In fact, in regard to the primary producers and the prairies farmers, we have at this time a situation in which the Government has not fully inquired into the ability of the farmers to pay. We on this side of the House have not had any qualms about the development of the rail lines. We hear the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the Minister of Transport (Mr. Axworthy) constantly saying that we do not want to go ahead with the work of advancing the rail lines and we want to stop the job. That is not so. That has never been the position of our Party. Our Party has constantly said that the work should go ahead and that the double tracking in areas over the passes and ports and so on should be dealt with. Our problem is with the farmers' ability to pay and that is where we come to accountability and access to information.

The Hon. Member for Regina West was the only NDP Member who travelled constantly with the committee and informed himself of what was going on. I find it strange that Members of the NDP and especially the Hon. Member for Regina West should suddenly be so concerned about the fact that they have moved a motion to break the statutory Crow rate. The Hon. Member for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain (Mr. Hamilton) has said again and again in the House that the importance of the statutory Crow rate to western farmers relates to two things. One is the fact that we in the West are 1,000 miles from open water. The second is that the Crow rate is actually the Magna Carta of the farmers and the grain producers. Members of the NDP have broken down that statutory rate by moving in the House an increase of 20 per cent to the statutory Crow rate as it now exists. They are now arguing—

An Hon. Member: They wouldn't support the freeze.

Mr. Gustafson: They certainly would not support the freeze which in fact was a retention of the statutory Crow rate.

I shall deal more specifically with the motions, Mr. Speaker, as they stand before us in the House. The Hon. Member for Portage-Marquette is saying that he would delete these words from Clause 29(5) of the Bill:

The members of the Committee shall treat in a confidential manner any information submitted under this section that is identified and treated as confidential by the railway company that submitted the information.

The Hon. Member for Portage-Marquette is simply saying that we will delete those words and we will make information

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public in every way to the primary producers and to the general public so that they will know exactly what is going on.

I dealt with the farmers' ability to pay a little earlier. I would like to make this point again, Mr. Speaker, because I think the most serious omission the Government has made in forcing closure in the House is in regard to the farmers' ability to pay. There has not been an up-to-date inquiry into that ability. The Gilson Report was made two and a half to three years ago.

Mr. Mazankowski: It didn't look at the ability to pay.

Mr. Gustafson: That report did not deal with the farmers' ability to pay but looked at everything in a roundabout fashion. Those who sat in on the committee hearings in Regina, Edmonton, Ottawa, Winnipeg and so on were well aware that the one major point that the farmers and all other groups were making was that they did not have the ability to pay, they did not have the ability to deal with the freight rate increases that would be called for under this Bill. Now today, of all things, Members of the NDP have come along and have put forward the same type of program as the Government.

A Government that would move closure without really digging into the situation to determine the ability of those farmers to meet obligations is beyond our comprehension. Accountability of the railroads to the farmers is very important. It is also important for the Government to have some accountability and to look into the ability of farmers to pay the increases that they are asking them to pay. If I had more time, Mr. Speaker, I would elaborate upon what this type of action and this type of Bill could mean to the country and to the producers if the Government moves ahead with closure on a Bill that will have serious economic effects on the country and the producers.

Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Hon. Member was asking for more time and I would like to assure him that if he needs more time, we would be glad to give him more time so that he could elaborate even further on his point.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I certainly defer to my colleague, the Hon. Member for Assiniboia (Mr. Gustafson). He made an outstanding and brilliant speech, but I would simply say with respect to the point of order raised by the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans) that I think it is about time we heard from Members of the NDP about where they stand on this particular issue.

Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, I rise again on that same point of order. It is not a matter of where we stand. The Hon. Member for Assiniboia, in the last seconds of his speech, indicated that if he only had more time, he could elaborate further. I can say on behalf of my colleagues that although we found his speech boring and completely irrelevant to what we are dealing with, we would gladly give him more time if he wanted it.