

Western Grain Transportation Act

● (1110)

There are many Members of the House and many people from the West, particularly Saskatchewan, who know that the Crow legislation made it possible for communities in western Canada to become established, to remain as communities with the possibility of a viable life and to build up what we call today the fibre of our Province. I know I am biased because I come from Saskatchewan. I have travelled the Province and I believe it has developed into a rather unique place on the planet. All across the Province there are viable communities established by people who have come from all over the world.

In pioneer days when the railroads were being built—and Mr. McKague was born two years before the first steel was laid in Saskatchewan—immigrants came to the communities being built all across the prairies. These people turned that land into fertile, food-producing farms.

In Saskatchewan today you can go to one town in which the predominant population is Ukrainian. You can go down the road about seven miles to another town and the people will be French-Canadian. Another 15 miles along there will be a German community, and so it goes, down the tracks. Each of these places was established by prairie settlers who came from different parts of the world and built towns, communities and viable centres where people could live and have a good life along the railroad lines. The railroads were the warp and woof of the fibre of our whole being.

Today it is extremely important to guard the human values established by our pioneer forefathers. These people put their lives, hearts, souls and futures into the West and made it a good place to live, a place in which the value of people, the value of the community and the ability to live together formed a Province built on unity and a common belief in itself.

The legislation proposed by the Minister is seen by some as a kind of saving dollars and cents legislation which will go to the very fibre of life on the Prairies. But this Party opposes the changes that make it necessary for people in those communities, those farming areas, those places in which the food of the world is produced, to shoulder an unfair burden.

I should like to repeat what Mr. McKague said in his clear, one hundred year old voice. He said that the Crow belongs to the West and an attack on the Crow in the West is an attack on life in the West.

● (1115)

Farmers, retired people, not just people on the land but storekeepers and business people, all know and understand that the reason these towns and centres continue to progress is that the Crow rate stabilizes the economy and the possibility for income on the Prairies. Everyone in western Canada knows that if the farmers are prosperous everyone ultimately benefits. It keeps the local stores open, it provides schools, it makes it possible for communities to have their own rinks, their own ball team and their own band. It makes it possible to live as viable human beings and to continue to do so. But they must keep the rail lines. The rail line is like an artery in a human body. If you cut an artery, the next thing that happens is that a

part of your body dies. Abandon the rail lines and that is just what will happen to those communities.

I speak with deep feeling for those people who want to keep their way of life. Their way of life is uniquely associated with their ability to have railroads, to have rail service which links them with the rest of the country and with the rest of the world. They must ship their produce to the markets of the world. This Bill to change the Crow rate is basically an attack against the fibre of life in Saskatchewan. As my old friend in Saskatoon, Mr. Percy McKague, who is 100 years old, says, "The Crow is part of the West. It belongs to the West." I hope that is where it stays.

Hon. Jake Epp (Provencher): Mr. Speaker, I have a number of points I would like to make and only ten minutes to make them, but perhaps I will be able to outline the areas I wish to highlight and, hopefully, there will be other occasions when I will be able to expand on these points. I look at the debate on the Crow rate proposals in a way similar to the way I looked at two other issues raised in this Parliament. First of all, it is not only a debate which relates to western Canada. Although the greatest impact will be in western Canada, it is a debate which has national implications and should concern every Member of the House.

The first major piece of legislation which affected us, I believe, as Canadians, and specifically as western Canadians, was the Constitution. Hon. Members might question why I raise the Constitution in this debate and I do so to make this point: it was a painful process for Canadians and for Hon. Members of this House. But to argue that the process did not result in a greater consensus would be violating the historical fact. What was argued in that exercise was that all Canadians are equal, that all regions are equal and that every Canadian and region should have the right and the ability to make their largest contribution to the national good; that they should have the right to develop their natural advantages. Canada as a whole benefits from the development of those natural advantages, not just simply the areas where that development takes place.

The second major piece of legislation which I believe affected Canadians in the perspective of how they see themselves was the National Energy Program. All of us, I would think, can agree that a national goal which has validity is that Canada become energy self-sufficient, and that is a national goal. The natural resources which give us that potential are based on the constitutional arrangement that those resources belong to the citizens of a given Province. But it does not stop there. Those Provinces and citizens have the right and the responsibility to develop those resources and to make the advantages which flow from that development available, again, to all Canadians.

● (1120)

That is essential, I believe, to understanding what Canada is. If we do not accept that principle, then those areas of the country, be it Atlantic Canada or western Canada, which do