

Movement of Grain

We believe the solution is to make the major elements of transportation a public facility, with public ownership and control, with public accountability—

● (1542)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. I regret to inform the hon. member that his allotted time has expired. He may continue with unanimous consent. Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to continue?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Benjamin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my hon. colleagues for giving me a few more minutes. I promise to take only a few more minutes. I will complete the sentence I had begun. Since Canadian Pacific has chosen, being a law unto itself, to relieve itself of the obligations it took on in exchange for the gifts of the Canadian people, the agreements entered into and the law of the land, it is time for Canada to bring the entire operation of Canadian Pacific Limited under public ownership and control. It is past time.

I want to close my argument by spending two or three minutes discussing our grain exports and our capacity to meet increased demand for grain. I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks that the Canadian Wheat Board completed a contract with the People's Republic of China for some three million tonnes. This contract took effect September 1.

Last spring—and I raised this matter in the House in questions to the minister—the U.S. department of agriculture predicted that Canada would not be able to take advantage of increased opportunities for enlarged grain sales to China. The U.S. department of agriculture said that that would be because Canada's capacity to deliver grain was seriously in question and, that this would be evident by November of 1978.

The Americans have not been able to get into the People's Republic of China market for a number of reasons. One has been that some of their own laws have prohibited credit sales to China by either the United States government or any other seller in the United States. However, as of just a few weeks ago the United States completed its first major contract with the People's Republic of China for 3.2 million tonnes of grain. Had our railroads lived up to their responsibilities and transferred some of their activities to the rehabilitation of their plants, the repair of their equipment and the purchase of equipment for grain movement to a greater degree than they did, that would automatically have placed the Canadian Wheat Board in a position to move to even larger contracts.

I do not doubt for a moment that the Canadian Wheat Board could have negotiated a contract with Red China for four million tonnes instead of three. Had the capability been in existence, the Canadian Wheat Board could have negotiated a contract for up to six million tonnes, which would come out of the total Canadian production of 38 million or 39 million tonnes.

Excellent work is being carried on at Vancouver with the expansion of our grain terminals. The minister has mentioned

[Mr. Benjamin.]

that. I am sure he will mention it again. We all agree that that is good. United Grain Growers, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and Alberta Wheat Pool have been and still are expanding and improving their capacities and capabilities at Vancouver. Work is in progress, or will be, in Prince Rupert. There is not much use in doing all that if the key part of the grain movement chain between the farmers' own elevators and those ports remains inadequate to keep doing even as well as we have been doing, and we certainly will not be able to increase our exports to countries such as China.

Mr. Forrest Hetland, a Canadian Wheat Board commissioner, spoke to the Canada Grains Council semi-annual meeting last October 18. Incidentally, I cannot help but say that that was a great day out west, at least in one part of the west. Mr. Hetland said that rapid expansion for world wheat and feed grain export markets is projected. He said that even if Canada's export market share stays where it is, more farm production will be needed and more will be expected from the grain handling system. He said that by 1985 Canada could be exporting about 20 million tonnes of wheat and about 10 million tonnes of feed grains. The most Canada ever exported was 21.4 million tonnes, and that was six years ago. Mr. Hetland said that increased rail capacity, more terminal storage, and aggressive marketing from the Wheat Board is needed if Canada is to reach its potential. He went on to say:

We will have to have a handling and transportation system that can cope, not just with the average months and years, but with the peak months and years as well.

I am happy to see the country elevator system and the grain elevator companies, particularly farmer-owned elevator companies, the pools and the UGG, moving ahead, upgrading and increasing their capacities at their country grain elevators, and upgrading and increasing their capacity at their grain terminals at Vancouver, but that has not been the case with both our railroads. I have said before in this House that we should re-nationalize CN and nationalize CP. Unless there is massive investment to improve railway plants, then the beginning of the system, the country elevator, and the end of the system, the terminal elevator, will sit inadequately used and not capable of living up to their potential. Our railroads are the pipelines between those two systems, and there has been a breakdown.

I urge this government and this minister to accept the recommendations of Mr. Justice Emmett Hall on the matter of statutory grain rates. The railroads should be reimbursed for any deficit on the cost of moving grain. The railroads should be required to purchase equipment. The government should not have to do this. The railroads should be required to live up to their responsibilities.

I urge this minister to enforce the Railway Act. I am not a lawyer. I am just an ordinary, innocent country boy—

An hon. Member: Innocent?

Mr. Benjamin:—but as I read the Railway Act and as I understand English, there is authority there for the Canadian Transport Commission and the minister to require Canadian Pacific or any other railroad to live up to its responsibility and