

Extension of Hours

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Roy (Laval): Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct a question to the Hon. Member. We are also anxious to know the position and attitude of the Progressive Conservative Government on that important legislation which aims at changing the transportation system in Western Canada.

My question therefore is to the Hon. Member, and I am in total agreement with him concerning what he said about how important it would be for other farm organizations to be heard in committee. I do not understand why there is so much opposition to referring Bill C-155, the grain transportation legislation, to the Standing Committee on Transport, so that if other farm organizations believe they have already expressed their views, they may over the summer, when there is no urgent work to be done, appear before the Transport Committee and make their submissions for and against, and also suggest potential improvements.

I therefore have difficulty understanding the NDP Members' attitude in their opposition to referring the Bill to the Committee on Transport, being the good democrats that they are, in order that interested groups may appear during the summer season before that Committee to express their views and discuss the whole question, since there will be no urgent work during that period, because during the fall, when proceedings would be very urgent, they would not be free to attend and express their views. This is a very liberal approach, Mr. Speaker, that is the referring of that legislation to the Committee on Transport in order that those groups may express their views during the summer, a relatively quiet period, on matters pertaining to agriculture.

[English]

Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief. In most circumstances I would find the Hon. Member's argument acceptable, but there is one point on which he fails. He knows that the farmers of western Canada are in the fields. They will be in their fields between now and the end of October almost continuously. It is not possible for them to take the time from their harvesting or other work that must be done in order to come to Ottawa or, for that matter, to be heard around the country. The difficulty with passing it now is that the hearings will be conducted during the time when the farmers do not have access to the hearing process.

Let me put an alternative. Suppose we stop second reading right now and refer the subject matter to a 20-member special committee which will be sent out across the country and which will report back November 1. That would give the farmers an opportunity to speak and be heard on these important matters. They could offer some input into the final stage of the matter. Would that be acceptable?

Mr. Pinard: Mr. Speaker, then the farmer would not be working in the summer because there would be a special committee.

Mr. Deans: I said if the subject matter was referred now for reporting back later, let us say November 1, it would allow adequate time for the farmers to be heard after they completed the work that must be done on their farms. If that were to be done, we might be prepared to consider such a proposal.

Mr. Towers: Mr. Speaker, will the House Leader of the New Democratic Party give us the position that his Party has taken with regard to the Progressive Conservative proposal of freedom of choice?

Mr. Deans: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Hon. Member would be kind enough to repeat his question. There is something in it that I missed; I did not quite catch it.

Mr. Towers: Mr. Speaker, the House Leader of the New Democratic Party went to some length establishing the problems in the movement of grain within Canada. The Conservative Party has made a proposal. We call it the "freedom of choice". Will the House Leader of the NDP tell us the NDP position, either for or against that proposal?

Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, the proposal is so vague that in the first instance one would have to be opposed to it, unless it were fleshed out significantly and shown to be workable. At the moment it appears to be unworkable because no one really understands it.

Mr. Towers: Mr. Speaker, the statement of the NDP House Leader proves exactly what I thought. He does not know what he is talking about. The proposal put forward by our Party is understood by the farmers in western Canada, even though the NDP House Leader does not understand it. I ask him to take that question to the farmers and see what they want his Party to do. Evidently he does not know. He is not aware of what freedom of choice means.

Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief. I am fully aware of what the PC Party said with regard to freedom of choice. What I said is that nobody understands how it would work.

Mr. Roger Simmons (Burin-St. George's): Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Nystrom: En français!

Mr. Simmons: *Mon ami intime*, we have been here a very long time, almost a year. We have done a lot of work. A lot has been done for the people of Canada since we came here last fall.

Mr. Blaikie: Don't straddle the issue.

Mr. Simmons: My good friend for Winnipeg-Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie) talks about straddling the issue. I had decided a moment ago not to take up the rather insightful question that my friend from Red Deer (Mr. Towers) put about where the NDP stands on the freedom of choice issue. He must know the answer to that question. He is a very informed man. The answer is that they are neither for it nor against it. They are both. They have what is known in the business as the "picket-