

Western Grain Transportation Act

think of the St. Lawrence Seaway, the ports of Thunder Bay, Churchill, Vancouver, Prince Rupert, and here again, will the Grain Transportation Administrator have some authority to put on sanctions against the St. Lawrence Seaway? At least that comes under the same Department, as do the ports. Will the Minister have authority to provide for sanctions or awards on trucking companies under the jurisdiction of a provincial Government? Will sanctions and awards be applied equitably as between the railroads and the trucking companies, or as between any of the what are called system participants? Again, the clause indicates what kind of mess the Bill is. This Bill is poorly thought out, poorly drafted, and obviously little, if any, consideration has been given to the ramifications of the legislation. What it means down the road if it ever became the law of the land, the Lord forbid.

There is an excellent reason for the number of amendments placed on the Order Paper by the Official Opposition and ourselves. If nothing else, they point out what a poorly drafted, poorly thought out piece of legislation it is. The Government is, in its single-minded, knee-jerk attempt, destroying the statutory grain rate and is giving money to the railroads with minimal accountability and no chance for a return on capital investment to taxpayers.

In the Government's blind attempts to meet those two relatively narrow objectives, the Government has failed completely and miserably to take into account the ramifications of the legislation which affect other agencies of the Crown, that affect transportation from Halifax to Prince Rupert, that affect grain companies and grain producers, and will result in the abandonment of at least another 1,500 miles of branch lines in western Canada. Most of those miles will be rail lines that are in the basic network that were supposed to be guaranteed until the year 2000.

There is excellent reason, and we have the grounds, Mr. Speaker, for opposing this legislation with every means that we have at our disposal under the rules. That has been our intent since day one and it remains our intent. If this Bill is passed as is, I want the Government and any successive government to be aware of my warning. Even the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool in a telex yesterday made it very plain that unless at least five significant changes are made in this legislation it should be withdrawn. The three Wheat Pools and the UGG have tried to negotiate and bargain with the Government. I think they got euchred and sucked in. Now they realize the stubbornness on the Government side. What they thought they could bargain and obtain in legislation, the Government is still refusing to give.

A couple of items the Government is prepared to move on, and one in particular is the safety net. There is nothing wrong with the principle of a safety net, but the way the Government wants to do it would be so unfair to grain producers in western Canada that it does not deserve the attention or support of this House unless the Government makes a substantial change to that safety net.

For those reasons we urge upon the House that it accept these amendments that keep the powers of the Canadian

Wheat Board and the Canada Grain Commission intact. We would allow the Grain Transportation Administrator to exercise his sanctions and awards over the railroads, which have been and still are the villains. These motions provide some good improvements to the legislation. I hate to be around helping the Government draft legislation, but it has done such an abysmal job that we are trying to be positive with amendments, even though our main objective is to persuade the Government to withdraw it or to persuade Members of the Official Opposition to join with us in stopping it. If they do, we can stop it.

● (1210)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): It has been brought to my attention that I neglected to mention the seconders to these motions, and I think I should do so now. In the case of Motion No. 41, it is moved by Mr. Benjamin and seconded by Mr. de Jong; Motion No. 42 is moved by Mr. Benjamin and seconded by Mr. de Jong; Motion No. 43 is moved by Mr. Benjamin and seconded by Mr. de Jong; Motion No. 44 is moved by Mr. McKnight and seconded by Mr. Mazankowski; Motion No. 45 is moved by Mr. Mayer and seconded by Mr. Gustafson; and Motion No. 46 is moved by Mr. Benjamin and seconded by Mr. de Jong.

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, at the outset I want to state that I agree with the sentiments expressed by the Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin) when he said that this Bill is a mess. It is very complicated. It creates a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety. It is a Bill that should not be proceeded with unless there are substantial changes.

The Hon. Member referred to four or five changes that were advanced by members of the Wheat Pool organization. That has been our position all along. Unless these changes are incorporated, I submit that the Bill should not be proceeded with. It will not meet the objectives originally outlined by the previous Minister of Transport, nor will it meet the objectives of western Canadian agriculture. As it now stands, it enjoys literally no support in the western agricultural community. It does not enjoy the support of grain producers. It does not enjoy the support of cattle producers or livestock producers. It does not enjoy the support of the respective commodity groups. Certainly it does not enjoy the support of processors. The only group which supports the piece of legislation is indeed the railroads, because they have for themselves a sweetheart deal. By virtue of the fact that the whole Crow benefit will be paid directly to the railroads, it is even more of a sweetheart deal. All they are doing is perpetuating a cost-plus transportation system and a guaranteed annual income for the railroads, nothing more.

At the outset let me indicate that it is not always easy to speak to a group of amendments which involve different principles, but I will try to cover them in the order in which they appear. Motion No. 41 is an amendment to Clause 21 in which the Hon. Member for Regina West wishes to substitute "railway companies" for "system participants". Quite frankly,