

● (1600)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS

[English]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Shall all orders preceding No. 66 stand by unanimous consent?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

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RAILWAY ACT

AMENDMENT RESPECTING MOVEMENT OF WESTERN GRAIN

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West) moved that Bill C-266, to amend the Railway Act (movement of Western Grain) be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Transport.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on a bill on which I have been working since November, 1978, at a time when the Canadian grain economy and the grain transportation system were facing a serious crisis. The lack of freight cars and poor performance by the railway companies was costing the farmers and the Canadian economy hundreds of millions of dollars in lost grain sales.

The record of the Canadian Transport Commission in regulating the grain transportation system is, in my opinion, abysmal. It had the power to end the back hauls on Canadian National and Canadian Pacific between Calgary and Edmonton years ago. It had the power to require the railways to interchange traffic for Churchill and Prince Rupert years ago. It has had the power, under Section 262 of the Railway Act, to require the railways to provide rolling stock and locomotives to ship farmers' grain. However, the Canadian Transport Commission has done nothing about making the railways live up to their statutory requirements to carry all traffic offered for carriage. I submit that the people of western Canada have little faith in the Canadian Transport Commission when it comes to grain movement, albeit it has now established a western Canadian office.

Some time ago, in fact in February, 1979, I initiated an application to the Canadian Transport Commission asking it to hold public hearings in western Canada to determine if the railways were giving grain transportation suitable priority, as required by law. I made the application then but no hearings were held, while the grain crisis at that time continued to cost the people of western Canada a lot of money. On April 24, 1980, the Canadian Transport Commission answered my application by saying that the purchase of hopper cars by the provinces and the federal government relieved the railways of their responsibilities. The Railway Act says in Section 262 that they shall offer suitable accommodation for all traffic. The CTC decided that someone else, namely, the provinces and the federal government, not the railways, should fulfil an obligation which, under the law, belongs to the railways.

Grain Transportation

I do not accuse the CTC of bad intentions, but it has been unable to understand the problems facing grain transportation. The Canadian Wheat Board has the advantage of being right on the spot, right on top of things, and knowing where grain sales are being lost and where backlogs occur. It knows where the grain is.

Since the CTC has said it will not deal with or regulate the railway companies in respect of grain movement because there is public investment in the hopper cars, there is now a regulatory vacuum which has to be filled. I suggest the Canadian Wheat Board is the logical candidate.

Actually, the idea for Bill C-266 came from a recommendation of the Hall commission. Mr. Justice Hall recommended, as appears at pages 538 and 539 of his report:

Throughout the hearings there was almost universal support for the Canadian Wheat Board . . . there is no doubt that the board is accepted as the producers' friend.

Again to quote Mr. Justice Hall:

The commission recommends that the Canadian Wheat Board play a more prominent role in the total co-ordination of grain transportation. Grain movement co-ordinators at Vancouver and Thunder Bay should become Canadian Wheat Board employees and be given extended powers over the ordering and placement of grain cars destined for those port areas.

I welcomed the creation of an over-all grain transport co-ordinator by the former Minister of Transport, my friend the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski), but I disagree with the creation of that position outside the Canadian Wheat Board. The Hall report said it should be part of the Canadian Wheat Board.

There are obvious reasons why the Hall commission recommended the Wheat Board be given control of grain cars and co-ordination. When the board is negotiating a sale, it will have first-hand knowledge and control of the transportation in order to maximize returns to the producers. The board can co-ordinate marketing objectives with ship arrivals and rail movements, and the board knows where the grain is and where it must go.

What does my bill do, Mr. Speaker? It has two aspects. It gives the Wheat Board the power to require railway companies to supply locomotives and rolling stock for grain movement. It updates a section of the Railway Act regulating grain movement.

Back when the act was originally written, most grain went to Thunder Bay, so this section 266 applied only to Thunder Bay. My bill, C-266, would extend the regulatory power to Vancouver, Prince Rupert and Churchill and it does not affect Section 262, the general accommodation section. It is pure coincidence that my bill has the same number as the section, Mr. Speaker.

My bill deals specifically with grain movement. The power in this section of the Railway Act has not been used frequently. In fact, in 1916, the Board of Transport Commissioners required the Canadian Northern to supply 1,200 cars and 36 locomotives to carry grain from the Goose Lake district to the Grand Trunk Pacific at Saskatoon, and required the Grand