

# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, October 17, 1983

The House met at 11 a.m.

• (1105)

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### WESTERN GRAIN TRANSPORTATION ACT

#### MEASURE TO ESTABLISH

The House resumed from Thursday, October 13, 1983 consideration of Bill C-155, an Act to facilitate the transportation, shipping and handling of western grain and to amend certain Acts in consequence thereof, as reported (with amendments) from the Standing Committee on Transport; and Motion No. 35 (Mr. Benjamin).

**Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak on this important amendment introduced by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin) to Clause 17 of Bill C-155. Since I am the first speaker this morning, perhaps I could clarify the purpose of this amendment.

Clause 17 sets out the duties and functions of the Administrator under the Act. He has a number of duties set out in Clause 1 through Clause 4 and Members of the House will recall that an amendment was introduced at committee stage introducing Subclause (4). Motion No. 35 would change Subclause (4). As it now stands, Subclause (4) gives the Administrator certain powers which we in this Party believe to be detrimental to the long-term interests of the farming community in Canada. It reads as follows:

The Administrator, on behalf of the Minister, may enter into agreements to provide for the movement of grain by motor vehicle transport where, in his opinion, such agreements would be in the best interests of the grain producers.

The purpose of our amendment is to ensure that where such agreements are entered into, they are not done so in a way which could lead to the abandonment of rail lines, particularly in rural parts of Canada such as the proposed abandonment of the E & N Railway on Vancouver Island. The amendment would permit this substitution to take place only in certain circumstances. My colleague's amendment would strike out line 25 at page 8 and substitute the following:

• (1110)

—the grain producers, but such agreements shall not provide for the movement of grain by motor vehicle transport from shipping points on rail lines which have not been abandoned by order of the Canadian Transport Commission.

This amendment is of absolutely fundamental importance, Mr. Speaker. Were it not to be included in the provisions of the legislation, what would happen very quickly is that the rail shippers would argue that the shipment of grain by rail on certain branch lines had become unprofitable because their volumes had gone down. That would have happened because they would have substituted transportation by truck.

Among other things, we are concerned that the trucking companies in question are none other than those owned by the railway companies, whether it be CPR or CNR. They will use the device of transfer to trucking as a means of accelerating the abandonment of these branch lines which are so vital in so many rural communities.

Questions have been raised by some Members of the Official Opposition about the possibility that this could cause hardship in the event a branch line became unserviceable for a period of time through, for example, a bridge washout or if the line was soft and the producer would not have an opportunity to transport grain by rail. The Official Opposition has claimed that this amendment would somehow preclude the producer from shipping in the most efficient manner.

I believe my distinguished colleague, the Hon. Member for Regina West, answered that objection admirably in committee, but since the objection has been raised in the House, I think it is important to deal with it. The Hon. Member for Lethbridge-Foothills (Mr. Thacker) said if there was a washout on the Medicine Hat line, for example, that under the circumstances of the amendment that is before the House it would block the Administrator from paying for that grain to go from the Cardston primary elevator. The Hon. Member for Regina West pointed out that in those circumstances the Canadian Wheat Board will make alternate arrangements and these arrangements will often be for trucking. It has done that on a number of occasions in the past, and certainly if this amendment were to be implemented—as I know the House will see fit to do—there would be no problem whatsoever with the Wheat Board picking up the slack in the event of a bridge washout on one of these lines. What we are attempting to do is to ensure that the branch lines are not abandoned by a mechanism which would accelerate its profit to go to CP.

Some people would ask in whose interest this is, and I will come to that in a moment in terms of the contributions made by CP and CN to the Government and the Official Opposition. I think it is relevant and important that, in examining the purpose of the amendment, we know precisely in whose interests we are dealing.

I should like to turn to another area now and examine the experience of the State of Iowa which I believe is most relevant. As Hon. Members will know, Iowa is an intensive