

Department of Transport Act

It does seem to me that there has been an attempt here to make it look as though Alberta is getting preferred treatment over Saskatchewan. The hon. member for Assiniboia, and I think the hon. member for Mackenzie, mentioned that in Alberta and Manitoba there were only 16 points that had less than a one-bushel quota. Well, I believe the point raised by the hon. member for Lethbridge is probably partly the explanation. Again, I should like to quote from the Alberta Wheat Pool Budget for April 20:

Last year a large proportion of the prairie wheat crop was 2 Northern and this grade has proved to be about the most difficult to sell. Most of the 5 and 6 wheat which has been plugging elevator facilities for some time has been cleared out and there has been a strong demand for 3 and 4 Northern but the top grades have been moving more slowly. This has worked against the farmers in southern Alberta and Saskatchewan as it has made it difficult to maintain good shipments out of those areas.

I think that is probably the explanation. I do not believe for one minute there would be any reason to discriminate against Saskatchewan as compared with Manitoba or Alberta. There have been times when Saskatchewan had a better quota than Alberta. I believe over a long average we will find that Saskatchewan will get just as good a deal as Alberta or Manitoba.

I am glad that this resolution has been introduced. We have gone through very difficult times, which I think are largely the result of exceptionally heavy crops. There has been a certain amount of what appeared to be discrimination, but generally when you investigate you will find there is a reason why certain points have had a poorer quota than others. I must frankly admit that, generally speaking, in all the deals I have had with the wheat board and the transport controllers a real attempt was made to solve the difficulty that was brought to their attention.

Mr. Low: I have just a word or two to say, Mr. Chairman, before the resolution is brought to a vote. I listened to what the minister said in his initial statement this afternoon, and it did seem to me at that time that the real difficulty existed with respect to the length of time which United States railroads kept our top quality box cars in their country. In that regard I should like to ask the minister if there is anything in the international agreement or any agreement that exists between Canadian and United States railways, which would prevent Canadian railroads from imposing a very heavy demurrage charge after a reasonable time from the date when the car left Canada. Now, it seems to me that if

[Mr. Quelch.]

we did have the authority to impose such a heavy demurrage charge per diem the United States railways would be more anxious to get the cars back here in good time. As I say, there may be some reason, by way of an international agreement, that forbids us doing such a thing.

Then, I should like to say one other thing. Some mention has been made this afternoon of the discrimination against certain areas. The Peace river country has been in a difficult position with respect to car allotments over the years, largely I think for the reason it is a longer haul and is quite isolated. On numerous occasions I have found it necessary to get in touch with Mr. Milner. I thought he was the man with whom to communicate with regard to the supply of box cars in that country. Whether or not he was charged with that responsibility, each time I got in touch with him he got action. But I learned later that what he really did was to communicate with the wheat board and ask them to place orders for the shipments of quantities and qualities of wheat available, and that were needed for export, in the Peace river country. Whenever he did the wheat board did put box cars into the Peace river area and the towns and villages that had felt the discrimination were soon served.

Now, I just wanted to say that in defence of Mr. Milner. He got action, and I have no complaint whatever about the manner in which he has handled any business that I have had to take to him. For that reason I believe we would be justified, at least on the basis of my own experience, in extending the time of this amendment.

There is one thing which I think ought to be done. From what I have heard here this afternoon, considerable confusion seems to exist about the functions and powers of the transport controller. It seems to me that some very specific and clear statement ought to be made to the members of the committee about those functions so that we would know exactly where we should go to get these so-called discriminations rectified. Would the minister be prepared to give us a statement on any regulations that have been passed in his department setting out the powers and functions of the controller, and relating those powers and functions to the powers and functions of the wheat board and the Department of Trade and Commerce? If we had those things clarified for us I am quite certain there would not be the criticism of Mr. Milner that we have heard in the past few days. I would thank the minister if he would make that quite clear.

Mr. Marler: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member in effect has just mentioned two