

Western Grain Transportation Act

amendments that are before us today. Before doing so, I would like to express my concern about the fact that the Government has seen fit to invoke closure on a Bill which is of so much vital concern to the grain producers in western Canada. I think it is safe to say that the vast majority, if not all, of the grain producers in western Canada are concerned about the impact of this Bill and even more concerned that closure has been brought in to prevent a proper and intelligent discussion of the various amendments that were put on the Order Paper.

Having said that, I would like to make some comments regarding the three motions before us and Motion No. 48 in particular. This motion was proposed by the Hon. Member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski) and it seeks to extend the debate from one hour, as limited in the Bill, to three days. The debate that is referred to concerns the regulations made under Clause 21(a). These are very important regulations because they set forth the performance objectives and pertain to awards and sanctions by the various system participants in the grain handling and transportation system. These three types of regulations are of utmost importance.

• (1115)

What happens under the Bill as presently constituted is that the regulations are prepared, they are laid before the House in accordance with Clause 22 and within 20 sitting days 15 Senators or 30 Members may request the referral of these regulations to a committee. I have no argument with the 15 Senators or 30 Members as the NDP has. I think 15 Senators or 30 Members is a fair representation. The matter goes to the committee for a period of 30 days and the committee reports back to Parliament. At that point in time Parliament does not have the power to take any action. For example, if the committee said "We do not agree with these regulations, they are wrong," there is no provision whereby Parliament can deal with them at that time. The Minister, despite the committee's report on the regulations, can go ahead and prepare the regulations and put them into force. Having been put into force, they are laid before Parliament within 15 days. This Bill provides for a one-hour debate only on the regulations that have been promulgated by the Minister by Order in Council.

As I said at the outset, these regulations are very important. It seems to me that a one-hour debate with a ten-minute speech limit is very inadequate. What can this House do in one hour with a series of ten-minute speeches, which means six speeches? This is why the Hon. Member for Vegreville put forth amendment No. 48 which provides for a three-day debate with no ten-minute limit. In that three days it seems to me many Members will have the opportunity to express their views on these regulations.

Members of the New Democratic Party have said there should be no time limitation but we are dealing with regulations, not with a Bill. In my opinion and in the opinion of the Members of our Party we feel that three days is adequate. With this in mind, I would recommend to Members of this House that when this motion comes to be considered and voted upon, Members of all Parties give it their support.

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon West): Mr. Speaker, I want simply to follow up on the comments made by my distinguished colleague, the Hon. Member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Neil), concerning the amendment put forward to Clause 24 of the Bill. What we have in terms of Clause 24 in this Bill is what I refer to as a rubber-stamp review of regulations on a very important element of the legislation. It gives you some sort of idea as to what this Government's attitude is with respect to western Canada, and what sincerity the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) in the last Speech from the Throne had when he made reference to the fact that, although there are no Members in the Liberal Party elected in western Canada of any consequence, he would want to listen to representations made by Members on this side of the House from western Canada on the legitimate concerns of people in that area. It is a demonstration of the Government's view of western Canada. It is that western Canada is worth one hour of debate on this piece of legislation respecting the performance of the railways; that is all, one hour. That is all the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party think is appropriate in terms of an important piece of legislation which affects what has been termed the Magna Carta of western Canada.

• (1120)

We have quite a different view of the matter. We think there should be some reasonable opportunity for debate in the House of Commons on legislation which affects the very substance and essence of a particular region of Canada. I feel rather strongly about the proposition of the Hon. Member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski) with respect to extending debate for at least three days. We have to understand that the motion is now being considered in the context of closure being imposed by the Government on the legislation. This gives us three days to consider every element of the remaining legislation, although we have not been able to discuss the most important parts of it. By virtue of the Government majority, we are being given only three days to discuss the remainder of the legislation on the floor of the House of Commons. For the Government to come forward now and suggest that one hour of debate in the House of Commons concerning the provisions of the Bill relating to the performance of those elements involved in the grain delivery system, the system participants, is simply outrageous and offensive to any thinking person, particularly those persons involved in the production of grain in western Canada.

I rise to debate this particular provision with a sense of anger and disbelief that the Government has taken such a draconian step as invoking closure to bring the debate to a close. I know the feeling in my part of the country about the activities of the Government. I know what are the provisions of this legislation with respect to the operation of the system proposed by the Government. Complex to a degree, unequalled by any other legislation, the Bill is indecipherable to people, even those involved in the industry and legal scholars. I venture to say that it will cause us nothing but grief and difficulty, not only in western Canada but across the country, simply to determine what the Bill means. When we come to