

Western Grain Transportation Act

accepted the bulk of their recommendations for paying all of the benefit to the railways.

I am surprised that no one made the point that throughout the debate on this issue, Mr. Garon does not really seem to have been protecting the interests of Canadian farmers, and I am also surprised to see that some Ministers of Agriculture in other provinces have totally ignored the national interest as far as agriculture is concerned.

Mr. Speaker, if in this country we are not capable of showing more concern for the national interest than has been shown during this debate, I think our country badly needs people with a more responsible outlook to defend it, at both the federal and the provincial level.

I was also somewhat astonished to hear the previous speaker mixing the Government's policy on the metric system and its energy policy in with his speech on the transportation policy, and making a kind of verbal hash as a result. I realize that he may be concerned and worried about these issues, but I do not think it is very sensible to air these concerns when the House is discussing a policy that is vital to this country. I explained to the farmers in my riding that I agreed with and understood the reasons behind the Minister of Transport's first policy statement. If we can doubletrack in the West, and we must, then we must do so in the interests of the entire country and not only of Western Canada. There were certain mechanisms the Minister was proposing and I agreed with them. In turn, I wanted some changes. I thought that if they did not pay according to acreage . . . that did not go down very well with our people, and they had more or less convinced me on this point, that payment should be shared between the farmers and the railways. I went along with this point of view, and the point I made when I met farmers in my riding who were members of the Coalition was the following. I told them that I had trouble understanding why they were using the word equity, because for all practical purposes, what the Minister of Transport was proposing was to reduce subsidies on grain transport and to spend substantial amounts on developing the railway network in the West, in order to improve the country's economy, because if we can doubletrack, in the 90s Canadians will be able to ship and sell \$2.5 million worth of grain.

Obviously, since farmers will have to spend a little more to get better transportation, they will probably make a bit less per ton of shipped grain, but they will be able to ship more wheat and more grain and more of everything, and in the final instance, their net income will be increased. And I told the Coalition farmers that they were objecting to the fact that because Western farmers would be making fewer profits, they would no longer be able to compete with the West, because Western farmers would be able to export pork, beef, and whatever they would be able to produce in Western Canada, and then I said that I found it somewhat paradoxical when on the one hand they were talking about equity, and at the same time they were saying that their competitive position was being

threatened because Western farmers would be subsidized a bit less per ton of wheat.

I said that perhaps we should look at a system where neither Eastern nor Western producers would be subsidized. Nothing. That is fair. There is nothing. No intervention, therefore total reliance on the forces of nature on what our land can produce with the help of the sun and its geographical location. And, may I ask at this point, what would Canadian agriculture be like if there were no subsidies? I would say that the gap which you are so concerned about would be still wider. Therefore, you might say that you would be less competitive, and on the other hand, with no subsidies whatsoever, without Government intervention, my friends, Western producers probably would be poorer because they would have lower incomes and would be unable all by themselves to totally fund the infrastructures they need.

● (1610)

And, when faced with that demonstration, people will say: Yes, maybe you are right. Then I say: What is to be done? What sort of intervention is needed from the federal Government to get the results that will benefit everyone? Because the test is national interest, and we should have this in mind while we make sure that nobody is to be penalized. And I hope that Mr. Caron, who led the battle, will never again contact me on the subject of transmission line corridors. I hope that Mr. Caron, our Minister of Agriculture, will be in a position to support the Minister of Energy if ever the Newfoundlanders, aware of their own interests, require a corridor for transmitting their hydro power across Quebec. Because it would be in the national interest for Newfoundlanders to get richer, and have access to a profitable market.

Throughout this debate during which the Minister has accepted to proceed at a slower pace, and has bowed to the request of a number of groups, including our caucus sub-committee, he has finally agreed in what probably is his wisdom and his greater understanding of Canadian society, and has told himself: Maybe we should go slower, by stages. He did not want to have people up in arms. And I thank him for this, not on behalf of the agricultural industry but because of the spirit of our common development. I hope that this magnificent proof of the Minister's generosity will serve as an example to all other Members. I hope it will be a source of inspiration to all Canadians. If we can show understanding rather than constant confrontation, it might take a bit longer but we should reach our goals.

Mr. Speaker, I thanked the Minister, not for what he has done for agriculture but rather for showing us that harmony has to be built up from scratch in Canada. I am convinced that if all of us on both sides of the House had supported the Minister, not for the policy he has introduced, but for everything he has done since the Gilson report, if Quebecers,