

Canadian Wheat Board Act

year, or the remainder of the crop year. But the railroad said, "This shipping point has had so many cars, as many or more than other shipping points have had". The next thing we knew, a week or two before the end of the crop year, the elevators were plugged and the quota had been raised from five bushels to seven bushels per acre. One of the elevator agents of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, the last two days of the crop year, July 30, went out and bought about 50 rolls of tar-paper. He spread it out on the ground down by the stockyards. He phoned all his wheat pool members and said, "Bring in your last two bushels per acre". We ended up with 57,000 bushels piled on the ground on top of the tar-paper. Then the railroads had to provide an additional 25 cars to pick that grain up off the ground.

• (1620)

I mention that story from my experience only to illustrate what I think is a problem about whether there is a large volume of producer cars. A large volume of producer cars, particularly in light of the experience of this past late summer and fall with a shortage of railway cars, means that those cars get siphoned off to individual producers while our elevator system is clogged, and then there are not enough cars.

The Minister sat on the committee when we were dealing with legislation that ended up getting the Western Grain Transportation Act which got rid of the Crow rate. He will recall very vividly, because I remember him getting a little angry once in a while too in dealing with the then Liberal Government, that we were told as an article of faith, let alone a leap of faith, that there would be lots of railway cars. What was it? "You get rid of the Crow rate, establish the Western Grain Transportation Act and all will be well. Never again will there be a shortage of cars. The tracks will get fixed up. There will be no more abandonments". It was going to be heaven on earth for those grain producers and grain companies. But what have we gone through this past few months, Mr. Speaker? There have not been enough cars. The railroads want to abandon another 6,000 or 7,000 miles of track in western Canada. Whatever happened to this great heaven on earth by having the Western Grain Transportation Act? The western grain farmers have been had again.

The Government seems to think that by relaxing measures regarding producer cars that somehow or other that will solve the problem of adequate transportation and that somehow or other that will lower the costs for producers. Well, Mr. Speaker, it does not. Who the dickens asked for these amendments on producer cars? I am not aware that the three wheat pools asked.

Mr. Mayer: The Wheat Board asked for them.

Mr. Benjamin: I am not aware that the Wheat Board Advisory Committee asked for it.

Mr. Mayer: The Wheat Board itself asked, Les.

Mr. Benjamin: I am not aware that the National Farmers Union asked for it. The Minister tells me that the Canadian Wheat Board asked. It seems to me that that would have been the time for the Minister to say, "Look, you better listen to your advisory committee members and go back to the drawing board on this one." I do not care who is running the organization or who set it up, none run 100 per cent perfect. I do not understand, unless the Wheat Board is trying to remove pressure for itself, the grain transportation agency and the provision of rolling stock, that this is the way to go about it.

We were also told that with the benefits of the Western Grain Transportation Act the grain producers would get their grain moved because the railroads would be fully compensated for the cost of transporting grain. They have been, and they are being fully compensated. The grain producers are paying an extra \$300 million a year in freight charges. The federal Government is paying a little over \$600 million a year extra to the railroads but we still do not have the tracks all fixed up. We still do not have enough rolling stock, yet the railroads want to abandon thousands more miles of railway track.

I think the Minister and the Government are attacking the problem from the wrong end. At best, just to satisfy a very few thousand individual producer cars and likely only a few hundred, or one or two thousand grain producers, you put higher costs in the handling system on all the other producers. You leave the elevator companies stuck with costs that they will be paying, for and they did not handle the grain.

Mr. Mayer: They all get the money now anyway. What are you talking about?

Mr. Benjamin: The elevator companies pay the railroads. Is every producer car assessed a charge for the cost of that siding? I do not think they are. Is that built into the freight bill? Is that an additional charge in the freight bill? Whatever happened to the system whereby a grain producer going into an elevator, if he were not satisfied with the grade or the dockage being offered by the elevator agent, could put his grain into a car subject to grade, dockage and condition? Once it arrived at Thunder Bay or Vancouver he would accept whatever the findings were there. In a sense, it was a producer car. He chose not to accept what the elevator company said it would grade his grain at but shipped it subject to grades dockage and condition. In a sense until that car arrived at export position or at a flour mill in the interior of Canada, he was in effect using a kind of producer car.

I hope the agriculture committee will go into this matter in a great deal of detail. I hope the committee will ask to hear from grain producers and organizations from all over western Canada. I hope the committee will question the Canadian Wheat Board very closely as to the reasons and the logic for the changes regarding producer cars. I am a little suspicious. I suspect, and I hope I am wrong, that it is for the likes of the former Palliser Wheat Growers Association which now calls itself the Wheat Growers Association, a few hundred of them.