

Western Grain Transportation Act

Today the vacancy rate is the highest in the country, well over 12 per cent, directly as a consequence of federal Government activity, activity in that case related to the National Energy Program.

I stand here today, Mr. Speaker, and deal with the subject of the Crow rate with a sort of sinking feeling in my stomach a feeling that the Liberal Government opposite, because of its lack of understanding of the industries in the West, is about to intensify the economic hardship which it has already created in western Canada through the National Energy Program.

Moving from energy to agriculture, when a Government seeks to change things too abruptly and too quickly without sufficient thought, the Government runs the risk of unintended side-effects which can be devastating to people in western Canada and, at the second level, devastating to people in eastern Canada.

The previous speaker brought to the attention of the House the potential for job loss in the Province of Ontario, the Province of Quebec and other Provinces in Canada, which will result if the Government is making a mistake. That job loss can be seen clearly and explicitly in the farm implement business, the manufacturing of tractors, motors and things of that nature.

It is particularly difficult, Mr. Speaker, to stand in the House and speak to this Bill knowing that it has been proposed by the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin), a Minister who at one time in his life was one of the chief commissioners of the Royal Commission on National Unity. Since the 1980 election, this particular Minister, who had taken one or two years out of his life to travel the country and work on a commission on national unity, has stood in the Chamber and supported a constitutional Bill which created a tremendous discord in the country, a Bill which gave birth to the separatist movement in western Canada, a Bill which intensified the feeling of separatism in the Province of Quebec. The two years that the Minister spent on that commission should have taught him a better lesson. We saw the same Minister stand in the House and support the National Energy Program. That was a tremendously divisive Bill which in my part of the world has created and sustained the birth and development of a separatist Party in western Canada. It is probably strongest in my region of Alberta. That movement is a direct consequence of two historic pieces of legislation brought to the House and supported by the Minister in the last three years, the Constitution and the National Energy Program.

● (1730)

I stand in the House today with the certain knowledge, as someone born, raised and educated in that part of the country, that the Government is proceeding to ram through another piece of legislation that will further intensify those feelings of alienation. There is much that is wrong with the Bill in a substantive sense, but the feelings evoked by it in my part of the country will be intensified by the substance of it.

Members on this side of the House were given 25 copies of the Bill on a Wednesday night, and at 11 o'clock the next morning the debate began. That is reminiscent of the way the

Constitution was handled. The Leader of this Party had 45 minutes to read the Government's proposal on the Constitution of Canada before responding to it. And this Party only had overnight to consider this extremely complex piece of legislation before debating it in the House the next day. The government has now signalled its intention to move closure on this Bill after only two days of debate.

The statutory Crow rate has been important to the development of western Canada for decades. The West views it as something gained upon entry into Confederation. It is a principle which has existed for decades. The Government does not have any elected Members to speak of in western Canada, yet it brings forward a piece of legislation that will irrevocably take that principle away from the people, and it does not even have the courtesy to allow a week for study before the debate. It lays it on the Table of this Chamber on a Wednesday, provides a few copies, forces us to debate it on Thursday, and after only two days of House time, invokes closure.

It is an insult to every Member of this Chamber and to every Canadian that anything so fundamental to our history and development should be treated in such a fashion by the Government. When people are insulted, they react negatively. They are angry at those who insult them and their memories last a long, long time. The solution to the problem of unity in this country is to change the Government as rapidly as possible, get a Prime Minister who understands and is sensitive to all regions of the country and a Cabinet that is likewise sensitive, as well as a Party running things with some sensitivity to the entire nation.

If I had words of wisdom for the Government they would be these: You are starting on the same path you started on with the Constitution of Canada and you are getting off that path. When you moved closure so quickly you insulted western Canadians. If you now move the Bill into committee and in any way, shape or form impose closure on the activities of the committee through an artificial deadline or using your majority to prevent witnesses from appearing then you are proceeding on a path which will be more and more insulting to the people of western Canada and you will be resisted with increasing strength.

This is a piece of legislation fundamental to the economic health of that region and indeed to the economic health of the whole nation. It is not a piece of legislation on which the Government should impose closure or use its majority in Committee to stifle freedom of debate and testimony. The only way we are going to arrive at an acceptable solution is to value freedom of speech and freedom of testimony. We must move slowly and carefully and in a manner which will help rather than hurt this nation.

Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley-Hants): Mr. Speaker, I participate in this debate with the same aggrieved feeling that other Members have expressed since, a little after three o'clock, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) moved closure on a Bill on which the debate began last Thursday. I have gone through the *Hansard* and I can see that the Bill has been debated for 10 hours and 50 minutes. Regardless of