Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, my question of privilege is that at the time the Chair interrupted me while I was attempting to raise a point of order, the Chair made reference to Members wasting the time of the House. I want to reserve the right to review the "blues" and I will, if need be, challenge the Chair on that particular assertion.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members will have to judge the record by itself. The record will stand. The Hon. Member for Rosemont.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude-André Lachance (Rosemont): Mr. Speaker, I would like to broach the problem underlying Bill C-155 in terms of the expansion of our export markets.

Our rail lines are the main arteries along which grain and other products are moved to export markets that are vital to the Canadian economy. Before the sixties, Canada's rail transportation system was capable of handling market expansion. However, with the advent of the sixties, our rail system began to handle other products such as coal, sulphur and potash in addition to grain. The handling capability of our rail system was simply not great enough to bring these products to our ports and, eventually, to foreign markets.

Back in the sixties, our rail lines handled only about 10 million tons annually. By 1980, the volume handled had already tripled. And, looking ahead to 1990, we can make the following projections for the commodities I mentioned earlier. By 1990, it is estimated that the system will move 53.3 million tons of coal compared with 14.1 million tons in 1980. For grain, the projected volume is 19 million tons compared to 10 million tons, for sulphur, 6.8 million tons compared to 5.4 million tons and for potash, 9 million tons compared to 3.6 million tons. Why is it so important for Canadians to tap foreign markets? How can our rail systems help to develop these markets? The answer is quite simple. These commodities, which come primarily from western Canada, can only be moved economically by rail.

To handle the increase in rail traffic, the railway authorities have been spending money for the past twenty years on improvements to the system. While I won't give you a complete rundown of all the improvements made, I will say that we are all aware of the nature of these investments which totalled approximately $2.4 billion. For the most part, these $2.4 billion came from the public coffers. Various subsidies and grants have made it possible for these companies to expand and upgrade the rail system.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that these improvements have now reached their limit and that a single track system, as opposed to a double track system, will not be able to handle the projected increase in volume that I quoted earlier for 1990. Therefore, we have to invest, and invest considerably, in order to be able to export enough commodities to enable us to survive as a trading nation. I would like at this time to quote another statistic: it is estimated that a single track is capable of handling between 30 million tons and 43 million tons per mile. We would have to move approximately 80 million tons per mile by 1990 if we wanted to meet the objectives to which I alluded earlier on. How much will this cost between 1981 and 1985? It is estimated that $7.7 billion will be needed to expand the rail system, that is about three times the amount invested during the sixties and seventies. If we look ahead to 1990, we are talking about $18 billion. And the total CN and CP revenues, before the economic recession, were somewhere around $4.6 billion. Therefore, we need to come up with an additional $3.1 billion and we have to realize that the chances of the railways securing financing from the private sector, either the private bond market or the private lending market, are rather limited.

What is the root of the problem? The fact is that while grain handling accounts for 20 per cent of overall system utilization, only 3.5 per cent of the income from the rail system stems from grain handling. And why is this? Clearly it is because of the statutory Crow freight rate which dates back to 1898, and which today represents only 18 per cent of actual grain transportation costs. It is estimated that it will account for only 9 per cent of real costs by 1990. It is also estimated that the income lost because of the freight rate amounted to approximately $469 million in 1980 and $670 million for 1981-82, considering that this was a bumper year. Why am I quoting all of these figures? Because, Mr. Speaker, with the exception of the New Democratic Party and the National Farmers Union, everyone seems to agree that the system needs to be upgraded and everyone seems to agree that the whole issue of the 1898 grain transportation freight rate needs to be reviewed.

We have no true alternative. If we do not move, we will be unable to transport the commodities we should transport by 1990. We will lose our markets abroad and Canada's reputation will suffer. We do not want to have to face such dire consequences and for this reason, we must review immediately the whole question of rail transportation and, in particular, the question of the grain freight rate. If, by 1985, a mere 10 per cent of potential exports could not be transported by rail because our system was inadequate, we would still stand to lose one billion dollars. The solution proposed by the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) has been the focus of numerous and lengthy debates and it's a good thing that this is so.

I had the opportunity to participate in the debate some time ago to deplore the fact that some Members do not even want us to debate this question in the House. They have tried a series of measures and manœuvres to prevent the House from debating the question of the Crow rate and the proposed amendments. They have prevented the House from doing its job. With respect to the proposals of the Minister of Transport,