

Opposition have a responsibility to our constituents to try as best we can to change the mind of the Government on this Bill, what it thinks is good in the Bill and what we think is good. At times we can come to mutual agreement, even with the NDP. There were times in committee when amendments were passed unanimously. In fact, the first amendment accepted was put forward by the NDP which was going to kill the Bill.

With this amendment, the NDP is attempting to remove an amendment which states "if the Administrator enters into an agreement by motor vehicle to move grain, he does so in the best interests of the producers". It is in the best interest of the producers, not in the best interests about which we hear from the NDP railroad flakes and not in the best interest of the railroads, but of the producers, the grain farmers, the men and women who grow and sell the grain. It is not in the best interest of the railroads, the elevator companies or the provincial Governments, but in the best interests of the producers.

We hear a lot of crying from the Members on our left about saving branch lines. I hear one of those Members "crowing" now. Let us go back in history. In 1979 when the Hon. Member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski) was Minister of Transport, he appointed the Hon. Member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Neil) to make a report on branch lines in western Canada, including the region I represent as well as those represented by some NDP Members.

The Hon. Member for Moose Jaw made a decision and made recommendations to the Hon. Member for Vegreville as Minister. He recommended that 490 miles of branch lines in western Canada be maintained in the permanent network until the year 2000. He made another recommendation, that is, that 236 miles—there are three of those branch lines in my riding—be frozen for five years so that we can review the proposal put forward by former Justice Emmett Hall as to the effectiveness of off-line elevators. He wanted to try them at Fisher Branch. He felt the producers in that area could benefit from an experiment. The Members for Moose Jaw and Vegreville wanted to freeze those lines, not abandon them, not to tear up the steel as they did in Arelee and Summingdale and the riding of the Hon. Member for Provencher (Mr. Epp). They wanted to freeze them until they had time to assess the benefits of off-line elevators.

What happened in the meantime? The NDP Members voted that Government out of office. They, along with the Liberals, said that the Member for Vegreville and the Member for Moose Jaw, who tried to save branch lines, are not serving the best interests of the producers of western Canada. They voted that Government out of office. They let the Liberals come in.

Do you know what the present Government did as soon as it was elected? It rescinded the Order in Council which would have saved 236 miles of branch lines. That is the way the NDP Members protected the branch lines in Saskatchewan. That is how they did it. They brought those people in to take away that freeze. The Minister who did that is in the Chamber at this time. I am sure we will hear from him. Brass-Kelfield is a line that runs from Brass to Kelfield in my riding. We went through the process of a CTC hearing. We did not have to go

through that process so long as the Hon. Member for Vegreville was Minister of Transport, but the NDP Members did not like that. They said he was not serving the best interest, they would have the Liberals in. What did the Liberals do? They abandoned 236 miles. This is the way they serve their constituents.

Now what did the people in Kelfield, Handel and Leipzig have to do? They no longer have a rail line. CTC said, "No, don't blame the trucker". The people responsible for that, along with the former Minister of Transport, are the NDP. They helped the Liberals come in. That is what they have done for branch lines. If I sat down now, would the former Minister of Transport like to speak?

Mr. Pepin: I would not dare intervene in a personal quarrel with the NDP.

Mr. McKnight: The people on the Kelfield branch will now have to haul their grain an additional 23 miles, on average. They have one hope with this amendment. Their line has been abandoned effective October 31. With this amendment and with the Bill, when it is put through, if ever, or even without it, with the good graces of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Axworthy), he could establish a trial off-line elevator service. The people in Leipzig, Kelfield and Handel will say that it will be harder on the roads. It will be. However, it won't be harder on the roads than hauling gravel or moving an oil rig or construction machinery. If it's hard to haul grain, it will be no harder on the highways and grid roads of Saskatchewan than if the farmers hauled it themselves. Somebody will have to pay.

These people want to save their branch line. That is their first choice. Their second choice would be to have a form of transportation so that they do not have to haul it. The Hon. Member for Humboldt-Lake Centre (Mr. Althouse) knows the cost of a tandem straight rig or a tractor to haul grain, or even the price of an ordinary three-to single-axle truck. Farmers do not have the ability to adjust that readily to those changes. However, the Administrator, working only in the best interests of the producers, has the ability to enter into agreements with trucking companies to move grain from a country elevator to another point. The cost of that would not be borne by the producer but by the Administrator out of the general revenues of this country.

I listened to the Hon. Member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom) and other Members talk about the vibrancy of the rural towns. I recognize that. The community I come from has a population of about 25. We have a post office and a couple of elevators. We want to keep our elevators and our branch lines.

Do not be fooled by thinking it is only the elevators and railroad companies which make the small towns in Saskatchewan vibrant. It is the people. In their belief, it has nothing whatsoever to do with elevators and railroads. It is a benefit, but it has nothing to do with the strength and fabric of those communities.