

*Western Grain Transportation Act*

after listening to this rather limited debate so far, to be two points of view. The first one is that we should not do anything with the Crow rate, but leave it the same way it has been since 1897. There are, obviously, good reasons for this. It is to the advantage of the prairie grain growers, or appears to be to their advantage, and it is of advantage to livestock feeders in the East. Some of the people to whom it is not of particular advantage are the shippers of other goods on the railways.

The other side of the argument is that the market should seek its own level, that we should go to a system of market rates. This is held to be in the long-term interest of everyone involved, including the grain farmers, in that if that were to happen, there would be incentives on the part of the railways to upgrade the system—this is said to be the case—and that the whole transportation system might be upgraded and brought into line with modern requirements. I do not really want to get into that debate because it is not for me to say. I would have liked to have heard the other evidence which was to have been presented by my colleagues from the prairie areas, but which they have been prevented from putting forward by the announcement made today by the Minister of Agriculture. However, what I do want to say is that when I look at these 39 pages of gobbledygook, Bill C-155, it does not seem to me to come down on the side of either of those arguments, and it does not even seem to be a compromise. It just does not seem to do anything, Mr. Speaker. We end up with the worst of both worlds in this Bill. It is neither fish nor fowl.

**Mr. Malone:** It's foul.

**Mr. Nickerson:** My friend, the Hon. Member for Crowfoot (Mr. Malone) says it is fowl. Perhaps he is right in that. I suspect he might be if he spelled that word in a different way. We still end up with the statutory rate, expect that the only difference is that no knows what the rate is now. Even I understood what half a cent a tonne mile meant. But there is no way I can figure out the statutory rate in this Bill. The section which deals with it has been read into the record on more than one occasion and I defy anyone to tell me what that rate is in cents per tonne miles. It is impossible to tell. It is all left up to arbitrary discretion of some Government appointee at some future point in time.

When you know the Liberal Government, as we know it on this side of the House, it is not difficult to understand why it came up with something like Bill C-155. What I would like to do in the few minutes I have is to isolate those principles, those obscure Liberal principles, which make this Bill as bad as it is, a "lunatic Bill" as was stated by the Hon. Member for Saskatchewan West (Mr. Hnatyshyn). The first principle that I see in this Bill, Mr. Speaker, is, "When in doubt, set up a committee". We see this with the so-called Senior Grain Transportation Committee which is to be established under this Bill if it ever becomes law. If the committee is set up, it will have two functions. First, it would allow the Government of the day, in this case a Liberal Government, to appoint its political friends to high office, to remunerative office, to positions of emolument. Second, by establishing yet another

committee, and I do not know how many we have under all the Acts of Parliament, the Minister and the Government could be isolated from any criticism. If criticism is made at some point in time, it can be said, "Oh, take that problem to the committee and argue it out there. It is no concern of ours". We have seen this principle at work with the establishment of Crown corporations such as the Post Office. If one asks the Minister responsible for Canada Post any kind of a question, he says, "Oh, I will refer that to the Crown corporation". The Government is trying to avoid responsibility in Bill C-155.

● (1630)

The second principle embodied in the Bill, as far as I can determine, is the principle of making something so complicated that no one can understand it. I rather suspect that the Bill was drafted by the same people who drafted the Income Tax Act. I have read it through three times as fully as I possibly could and I do not know what it says. When something is made as difficult to understand as this, it is another way of avoiding criticism. When one says, "I do not agree with such and such a point in the Bill", the Minister can turn around and ask someone in his Department to say, "That is not really the point at all. I will just try to elucidate it a little for you". If one reviews a different section or subsection, one finds that that is not quite right. This is the type of response the Government has to valid criticisms of its proposals with respect to the Crow rate. It comes up with something which is so complicated that I am sure not one farmer in western Canada can really understand.

The third principle involved in the Bill is to create yet another slush fund. The Liberals just love this idea of shovelling taxpayers' money from one group to another, having the discretion as to how the taxpayers' money should be used. In this Bill we see it with a kitty of \$600 million of taxpayers' money in the Crow benefit.

**Mr. Pepin:** You are against it?

**Mr. Nickerson:** The Government can give this to whom it likes. In the first instance, it would prefer to give it to the railway company. However, they like having control of the taxpayers' money. This is the way it likes to operate. It likes to have lots of money around which it can hand out at its political pleasure for its political reasons.

The next principle embodied is the arbitrary and discretionary power which is to be given to Ministers, in this case the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin), and to appointees of Ministers. Instead of having a law which is simple and straightforward and which everyone could understand, in which the terms and conditions are laid out, if a subvention is to be given, for instance, what the Government likes to do is to leave it to someone's discretion, the Minister's discretion. He can decide who will receive this benefit or not. He can decide what appointments are to be made, what regulations are to come through, what rules are to be made, or he can delegate that to one of his political friends, one of his appointees.