our criticisms of the Bill and our long-standing criticisms of attempts to demolish the statutory grain rate, the Crow rate, have never in any way been meant in a personal way to the Minister. Anything my colleagues and I have to say is not meant personally. We look upon the Minister as being nothing more than the inheritor and victim of the Otto Lang and Jack Pickersgill user-pay policy which has continually helped to divide the country.

• (1230)

Statutory grain rates are one of a number of provisions in all regions of Canada designed to take into account our geography and our climate. They are designed to take into account where our people live, where they produce agricultural or manufactured products, and also our competitors in international markets, so that we obtain a reasonable share of exports. If we remove a benefit from one region, we cannot help but increase disunity in the nation and harm Confederation.

The legislation proposed by the Minister strikes at what is to Canadians west of Thunder Bay a charter, a part of Confederation and a birthright. Today's generation of farmers in western Canada were born after the Crowsnest Pass Agreement of 1897. That is the fundamental reason for this legislation being wrong.

At the outset I want to say on behalf of my Party that we have never opposed changes, improvements and rehabilitation of the rail transportation system. In fact, we were among the first to call for them. However, our second main reason for opposing the legislation is that grain farmers will have to pay more freight charges.

I think the Minister made a remark during his speech, if I heard him correctly, about providing $1 billion per year in aid to western agriculture. The Minister's legislation will mean that by 1991 grain producers will be paying well in excess of $1 billion in extra freight charges. When grain prices are continuing to fall and remain below the cost of production, I find it unconscionable for any Government to try to foist additional increased costs on our grain producers or, for that matter, on any other agricultural producer.

The benefits in the statutory grain rate for western Canada have kept us competitive in world markets, have gained billions of dollars every year in foreign exchange for the nation as a whole and have meant that consumers from coast to coast have had the benefit of the price of milling wheat, flour and bread being held down. This benefited all Canadians. Since the statutory rate is of benefit to the nation as a whole, surely the nation as a whole should pay the major portion of the cost of delivering grain to export positions and to Canadian consumers. Surely that is part of co-operative federalism.

The same thing applies to the Maritime Freight Rates Act, the Atlantic Region Freight Assistance Act, the At and East freight rates and the bridge rates. The same thing applied to tariff protection for industry, most of which was located in central Canada. This meant higher costs for all Canadian consumers, but all Canadians willingly shared in the cost of helping one another in different regions of Canada. This legislation attacks that principle which was established in the 1880s and 1890s and was continued by successive Governments. Now, in the name of providing guaranteed profits for railways and guaranteed losses for farmers, the Government attacks an essential instrument for national unity in the nation.

Of course, there are some people happy with the legislation. I am sure that Canadian Pacific shareholders and its board of directors are just delighted. Since the Minister's announcement on February 1, the value of Canadian Pacific Ltd. shares has risen by $745 million. That is a 30 per cent increase in the value of Canadian Pacific Ltd. stock. Naturally Canadian Pacific Ltd. is happy with the legislation. Naturally the coal industry in Canada is happy with the legislation. Naturally the Canadian manufacturers Association and the Chambers of Commerce are happy with it. None of them grows grain. Of the hundred and some organizations about which the Minister dragged in his futile effort to get consensus, over 60 of them do not grow grain or have anything to do with the production, delivery and sale of grain.

Grain producers of western Canada have been picked as the villains who caused the inadequacies in our transportation system. Grain has never occupied more than 19 per cent of the track capacity in western Canada to the Pacific Coast. Right now it is around 15 per cent, and in a year or two it will be down to 14 per cent. The mythology perpetuated by the Minister, his predecessors and other non-grain and non-agricultural corporations and organizations was that it was all the fault of grain producers that the railway system was in a deplorable condition and not meeting the needs of the nation.

The Minister talked about weighting legislative authority to get guarantees out of the railways. He has all the legislative authority he needs in the Canadian Pacific Railway Act, the National Transportation Act and the Railway Act. I am sure he knows as well as I that Section 262 provides that the railways "shall", not "may", provide suitable accommodation for all traffic offered. "Suitable accommodation" means tracks, railway cars, locomotives, tunnels and whatever else is needed. The Minister can enforce the legal authority he alrady has by placing telephone calls to the Presidents of each railway.

I want to acknowledge too the presence in the gallery today of Mr. Justice Emmett Hall. I want to quote him for the benefit of the Minister and my colleagues to my right. This is another reason we oppose the Bill. He said:

> If once tampering with the statutory rate is accepted or condoned or as an item on the bargaining table, all will be lost. For once the subject is on the bargaining table, it will only be a matter of time until it is lost step by step. There is no position to take except to adhere through thick and thin that the Crow rate is not bargainable.

We support that unequivocally. The one disagreement I have with my good friends in the Wheat Pools and in other farm organizations is their willingness to accept an increase in freight rate costs for grain producers at a time, under present economic conditions, when they cannot afford it.

While there are those who say there should be change and that they are prepared to see grain producers pay more in