

AGRICULTURE

FERTILIZER—INQUIRY AS TO POSSIBLE ACTION FOLLOWING COMBINES INVESTIGATION

Mr. Bill Jarvis (Perth-Wilmot): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture and it arises out of his answer yesterday to the hon. member for Elgin when he informed the House that an investigation had been going on for some time under the Combines Investigation Act into the fertilizer industry. The minister informed the House earlier that extensive investigations had been carried on by his department and that he will be tabling information. May I ask the minister, as a point of clarification, whether any further action is contemplated on behalf of the minister or his department, depending upon the completion of the investigation under the Combines Investigation Act. In other words, will no further action be taken by the minister until the Combines Investigation Act study has been completed?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, we are putting the facts together and then we will decide how far we can go with the legislation we have at present. As I said the other day in answer to the question about fertilizer prices, we have legislation before the House that gives us the power to hold the prices, and if we find that unwarranted profits are being made, we have the power to roll back the prices. However, we would be in a better position to act immediately if we had the legislation, but we will use whatever legislation we have in co-operation with the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs to do what we can do. We are not at all happy with what they are doing.

Mr. Jarvis: Is it the minister's opinion therefore that the relationship with the fertilizer industry is such at the moment that some legal action may be necessary rather than any persuasive action that the minister might take with the representatives of that industry?

Mr. Whelan: We do know that, for instance, the Alberta pool, if I can use names, did not raise the price of fertilizer that high. We hope for similar action from other companies and co-operatives. I fought hard for co-operatives to receive better tax concessions so that no cosy deals are made.

● (1220)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

RAILWAY ACT

AMENDMENT TO GIVE AUTHORITY TO MINISTER TO ACQUIRE CERTAIN COST INFORMATION FROM COMPANIES

Hon. Jean Marchand (Minister of Transport) moved that Bill C-48, an Act to amend the Railway Act, as reported (without amendment) from the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, be concurred in.

Railway Act

Mr. Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said motion?

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time?

Some hon. Members: Now.

Mr. Marchand (Langelier) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said motion.

[English]

Mr. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Before this bill passes, Mr. Speaker, there are a few things I would like to say about it. The fact that this bill has been introduced by the government and proceeded with very rapidly is an indication that the opposition has indeed shown its willingness to co-operate with the government in bringing forth any legislation with respect to transportation. Through the good offices of the deputy House leader of our party an arrangement was made whereby the speakers were limited to one from each party on second reading, and the bill passed committee stage after only two committee hearings, so I think it is fair to say that we on this side welcome this piece of legislation as we welcome any legislation with respect to transportation policy.

The major thrust of this bill, which calls for cost disclosure by the railways on a government to government basis, arises from the proceedings of the Western Economic Conference which was held in Calgary July 24 to 26, 1973. I think it is fair to say that the concept of the bill was inspired by the provinces, and the purpose of the request to the provinces was to give them an opportunity to evaluate cost data and to consider the effect of the freight rate structure as it relates to the growth and potential of economic development in the various regions of Canada. I think it also goes beyond that, in that the provinces wish to obtain information about the impact on various regulations and facilities with respect to our whole approach to national transportation.

I believe it is fair to say that in the initial stages the provinces asked for full public disclosure relating to the costs and freight rate structures of the various modes of transportation. The government, in its wisdom, saw fit not to proceed on that basis, but rather on the basis of disclosure on a government to government basis. I do not believe we find any objection to that because the freight rate structure and the manner in which freight rates are arrived at are a very important element of the over-all transportation policy; they are, indeed, very important to the over-all approach to overcoming the anomalies and discrepancies existing within our freight rate structure. Therefore, I want to point out that on this basis we agree with the bill.

I think the fact that we have this bill will give the provinces a better opportunity to study and assess the full impact of freight rates; they will be able to proceed in a much more knowledgeable fashion. I believe we must look at our freight rate structure in the light that freight rates must not only be fair but they must be seen to be fair. Hopefully, throughout the deliberations which will take