

Western Grain Transportation Act

found, great quantities of grain grown on, say, the Goose Lake line . . . and now that may not mean to much to Members from the East, but it is one of the great grain-producing areas in Saskatchewan between Saskatoon and Calgary served by the Canadian National Railways—

It is much better to move that grain through Edmonton, as the Hon. Member for Kootenay East-Revelstoke (Mr. Parker) mentioned earlier. Instead, the grain is shipped through Calgary. We have put before the House a number of examples where co-operation was logical, efficient and valuable to the producers and to the railways, but they would not do it. If they would not do it where they were losing money, there is no hope that they will do it when moving grain becomes profitable.

This Bill allows a kind of profitability which our farmers would love to have. Ask any farmer if he would find acceptable a 20 per cent guaranteed profit on what it costs to farm. We would like to see that kind of situation for our farmers. Since we are giving it to the railways we should demand from them the kind of efficiency which would allow that to be possible.

We have argued that there is no need for the Grain Transportation Agency. Also, we have argued that the Administrator has too much power. However, we go along with this amendment of the Hon. Member for Vegreville. Although under certain circumstances we think that his power encroaches on the power of the Wheat Board, if he is to be there we should have this kind of amendment which gives him power to increase the efficiency of the agency. No matter what public agency is finally given control over the movement of cars, the Administrator needs the power to force this kind of co-operation.

Over the years, the railways have been operating under the Railway Act. That Act gives power to the Canadian Transport Commission to require certain efficiencies and qualities regarding the movement of cars. The CTC has never used the Railway Act. It has never used the powers that it has. If we gave those powers to an agent directly involved in the movement of grain, possibly he would use those powers to help the producers and the grain transportation system.

Mr. Gordon Towers (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, in rising to enter the debate on the amendment of my colleague for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski), I trust that Members opposite are paying adequate attention to the arguments being presented on this side of the House. The Chairman of the Transport Committee, who spent a considerable part of the summer chairing this committee as it toured western Canada, is in the Chamber. As Chairman, he has been very fair, honest and straightforward in the approach that he has taken to this. We respect him for it. There is a great misunderstanding, though—

● (1750)

Mr. Huntington: He spoke against the amendment.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Hon. Member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers) has the floor.

Mr. Towers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, but I always welcome the interjections of my colleagues because they are always very worthwhile and, hopefully, the Members opposite will pay attention to them. Nevertheless, he does have his shortcomings and one of them is that if he debated and argued against this amendment, then certainly his education is not complete. He still has something more to learn, and perhaps another trip to western Canada would stand him in good stead and help him understand exactly what happens there.

I recognize what this amendment is attempting to achieve because my constituency lies between two of the railways, the CPR and the CNR. I recognize that those cities or towns with grain moving facilities in an area served by two railroads do get better service than those that are isolated from either one or the other. There is no doubt that if this amendment is accepted by the Government and there is a reciprocal arrangement made between the CPR and the CNR, the farmers will enjoy the benefit of it.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, possibly because of the politics of the Government in one form or another, quite often the farmer or the grain producer is the forgotten individual. Somebody, and it really does not matter who or whether or not his agency is called the Grain Transportation Agency, must have the authority to emphasize to the participants involved in moving grain that the grain must move in an efficient manner.

An interesting thing came out of the committee hearings. One of the witnesses before the committee stated that if we could have a 2.5 per cent improvement in efficiency in the movement of grain each year, however the railroads, the grain companies and the shipping facilities at port operated, it would mean that there would not necessarily be any increase in the cost to the producer. This is of fundamental importance because, at this time, the producer cannot afford to pay any more for moving his grain until such time as the price of grain goes up.

Those of us on this side of the House know very well what the Snavely Report meant, and one of the arguments I had with that report is that it accepted the railways' figures. I do not think, Mr. Speaker, that we must accept those figures, because I have never seen an operation yet that could not become more efficient with proper leadership.

This amendment, if accepted by the Government, will provide a more efficient system of moving grain. In the competitive world that we live in, we must compete against our counterpart south of the 49th parallel. I was in that country just recently and those farmers were receiving anywhere from 50 cents to 80 cents a bushel more for a comparative bushel of barley than those farmers north of the 49th parallel. This is something of basic importance and something of which we must be cognizant.

An area of the movement and transportation of grain in which we can give full credit to the producer is the area of efficiency because the producer has certainly done his part in improving efficiency. However, there is a limit to the extent that the producer can go. I think at the present time, with the increased costs of energy, there are dire times ahead for the