

Western Grain Transportation Act

The third point concerns the statutory freight structure. The Minister's proposal takes the railways off the hook. It takes them off their statutory and historical obligation from which they will be fully relieved. That is fundamentally wrong. Furthermore, it will perpetuate a cost-plus freight rate structure.

I suggest to the House and challenge the Minister that what will happen is that the farmers will become the same victims as the passengers of VIA Rail. This is the same type of cost-plus formula that will be put in place. It really does not matter whether it is a Crown corporation or a private company, the same cost-plus formula will be in existence. Therefore, if the NDP want to renationalize the CNR and nationalize the CPR, the formula will remain the same. The fact of the matter is that they are the friends of the railroads. They are advocating a guaranteed annual income for the railroads.

The fourth point concerns the method of payment. The Minister knows that his proposal is not satisfactory and has not met with any degree of acceptance across the Prairies. In fact, the Gilson proposal recommended an 81-19 split in favour of the producers. The Minister then chose a 50-50 split. He will now send the \$651 million Crow benefit directly to the railroads. I suggest this is well documented. The livestock industry has certainly documented its case very well. The future of the livestock industry in western Canada will suffer a very serious blow. It will be a serious blow to further diversification and processing.

We have offered a suggestion. It may not be perfect and we would be the first to admit that. However, it is a principle that I believe bears some serious consideration and study by the Government.

The NDP believe that individual producers do not have the brains, capacity or ability to make their own decisions. They believe that the Government should make the decisions because producers are not capable of doing so. I ask the NDP to come forth with a solution that would address the problems of the livestock producers and the need to further diversify.

The Alberta Wheat Pool has recognized that this is a serious flaw in this particular Bill. The fact of the matter is that we have a current situation in which this Bill must be improved because it cannot go forward as it exists. In its present form it will deliver a tremendous body blow to the future of agriculture in western Canada.

I repeat that the NDP are really the friends of the railroads. They want the \$651 million plus to go to the railroads in perpetuity. We have spoken out on behalf of the producers. We firmly believe that the freedom of choice option would give the individual producer the opportunity to retain some of that benefit in his own pocket, thereby maximizing incomes to the producers. It would ameliorate some tensions. It would inject some competition into the system and provide for some efficiencies. Most of all, the bottom line is that it would enhance the income potential of the producers.

• (1230)

I conclude by simply saying that what we solicit is a fair, equitable, reasonable, practical, common sense solution, serving the broadest interests of western Canadian agriculture. This is a complex Bill. It is a contentious Bill and it is necessary for this Minister to provide maximum flexibility. We appeal to the Minister to rise in his place to address some of the very serious objections we have made during the course of this debate. Failure to do so is a clear indication that he is not prepared to accommodate and is not prepared to be flexible on this issue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gus Mitges (Grey-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to say a few words once again on the proposed Western Grain Transportation Act, Bill C-155.

There is no question, Mr. Speaker, that the passing of this Bill and the abolishment of the Crow rate will have a devastating effect on the people of western Canada and indeed on all Canadians. What this Bill does is add to the divisiveness of Canada at a time when everything should be done to heal the wounds of disunity and to make this country whole again.

I do not believe there is any place in Canada for greed and avarice by some special interest groups at the expense of the unity of our country and at the expense of the further growth and total development of our country, and I mean every section of our country, be it the East or the West.

By going out of the way needlessly to antagonize and to frustrate people in one section of the country to please people in another section is like playing both ends against the middle. The results, Mr. Speaker, always prove disastrous for everyone concerned.

This is what will happen if the producers and the people of western Canada are not given a fair shake in this proposed legislation. I believe a fair shake was in the offing when the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) originally drafted the legislation to divide the proposal annual subsidy of \$651 million between the producers and the railways.

Mr. Pepin: Where were you then?

Mr. Mitges: I believe this was a good proposal. But, Mr. Speaker, through pressure from the wheat pools and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Minister unfortunately was pressured to change his mind from this common-sense approach and forced to direct the full subsidy to the railways, thereby selling the producers down the river.

I do not know but perhaps the usual Liberal logic prevailed, because without any elected representatives in western Canada, the Party as a whole would have nothing to lose politically. I can tell you that such logic will have a negative lasting effect on western Canada voters regarding the Liberal Party for many generations into the future.

Mr. Pepin: Is that why you chose your Leader from Quebec?