

Western Grain Transportation Act

running side by side, competing with each other, nor does one have two different sewage lines or telephone lines, because it does not make economic sense.

To advance the argument that we need competition between trucking and railroads is to say that we need competition between the power lines and that we need competition between telephone companies. The capital cost of having two viable systems of transporting and shipping grain would be so prohibitive that, in the end, it would be the taxpayers of Canada and the farmers, the producers, who would end up having to pay for the maintenance of those two systems. Personally, I suspect that in the end we will have only one major system, and that will be roads, if the Bill, plus its amendment, is passed.

● (1640)

This clause, proposed by the Conservatives and voted for by the Conservatives and Liberals in the committee and which the present amendment by the Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin) is seeking to delete, will allow the gradual introduction of trucking of grain on a piecemeal basis. It will allow certain lines to become abandoned.

When we talk about trucking, we are really talking about CP and CN. They are the major truckers, and this measure would allow them to move shipments of grain from their railway lines to their trucks. Why should they not be in favour of that? The roads are maintained through municipal and provincial taxes. That is one less responsibility for the railroads, so they would obviously like to see many lines abandoned and grain shipments revert to being trucked. It is in their interest to have this particular amendment introduced and passed. Therefore, when we hear Members of the Conservative Party talk about the interest of the producers, it is really the talk of George Orwell in "1984" where words are one thing but their real meaning and intent is something else.

Why is it so important for us in the NDP to support this amendment and fight against opening the door to trucking? First, we feel that the branch lines must be protected. We must establish the principle once and for all that the major vehicle for moving grain in western Canada is our railroad system. We should not allow little tricks like this piece of legislation begin to whittle away at our rail line system.

Our second concern is that by allowing trucking we are only encouraging more inland terminals. The Hon. Member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers), who just spoke, essentially proved that point when he gave his impression of how great the Weyburn inland terminal is and how it is able to exist because of trucking. A few inland terminals in Saskatchewan would undoubtedly destroy the social fabric of our Province. Trucking would lay town after town in ruin.

We will fight this because we believe that people should be able to control their own destiny rather than that the railroads and a few large grain companies should control the health and well being of rural Saskatchewan. It should be in the hands of the people and not just in a few corporate boardrooms.

The other big loser as a result of this legislation will be the whole pool system. The Wheat Pools are based upon the notion of a decentralized grain collecting and handling system. They are based on a notion which keeps many small towns and rural communities viable. There is a tremendous capital investment in that system. If trucking is allowed to take place, many of those rural elevators and towns will become obsolete and a major capital investment by the pools will be wiped out. The Cargills and major private grain companies will be encouraged to move in.

I predict that if this piece of legislation passes and our amendment today is defeated, the pools will see a steady erosion of their market position over the next decade. Instead of being the major handler of grain in western Canada, their importance will decline steadily. The private grain handlers such as Cargill will have achieved their victory and we will see the destruction of the pools.

The other major loser from this will be the local municipalities. We have heard arguments suggesting that our roads are of such good quality today that grain trucks could travel on municipal roads without doing any damage to them or necessitating an increase in municipal and provincial taxes for their upkeep. I wish that were true, but surely the facts speak against that. We have heard Members of my Party use the State of Iowa as an example. It has been found that large scale trucking of grain in that State was so expensive that it decided to supply subsidies to the railroads and use them as the major source of grain transportation. That was my experience as well when I visited the States of North Dakota and Montana in the spring of 1982. At that time I talked to elevator operators, producers and to the Commissioner of Agriculture in the State of North Dakota. Without exception, they told me time and again that trucking of grain was detrimental to the small elevator points and that it meant tremendous increases in the cost of road maintenance. I believe that to suggest otherwise is very foolish indeed.

In closing I wish to talk briefly about the role of the small trucker. Small truckers to whom I have talked have said that the majors are not allowing them to exist. In Saskatchewan, for example, as recently as September 22 of this year, CP trucking bought four of our larger trucking firms in Saskatchewan. This deal with the four firms, which had revenues of over \$10 million last year, is another illustration of the concentration of powers by the railroads in the trucking business.

I see that my time is up, Mr. Speaker. I seek unanimous consent of the House to close my remarks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Is there unanimous consent to allow the Hon. Member to continue his remarks?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Some Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Doug Anguish (The Battlefords-Meadow Lake): Madam Speaker, I would like to make a few comments this afternoon concerning Motion No. 34 to Bill C-155 which has