

*Transportation of Grain*

The Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) pretends that the New Democratic Party is reactionary when it comes to transportation and grain movement in western Canada. I want to compare what he is proposing and now doing with what we propose, and the listener can decide which is reactionary and which is forward thinking.

We agree with Hall that an electrification process should be carried out on 10,000 miles of mainline trackage in western Canada, particularly through the mountains. There are a number of reasons for this. We are in an era of fuel shortages. Petroleum fuel is in short supply. Electricity could be generated from the waters in the mountains of British Columbia. The surplus there could be used to power trains.

The advantages of electric trains for mountain transportation are fairly numerous. The mode of power would be lighter. It would reduce the amount of energy required to move a unit up a grade. The generators and fuel would not be part of the engine and the train unit. The fuel is water or other forms of generating electricity, and the generator would be located elsewhere. The electricity is transferred to motors on what are now diesel units.

Another reason for using electric power, especially in mountain work, is that the unit travelling through the passes would be lighter. In places where they have been used, it has been proved that the speed increases by up to 50 per cent. Instead of a unit travelling at 20 miles an hour through a mountain pass, an electric unit could travel at 30 miles an hour.

By using electricity, it would be possible to gain a benefit on the downgrade. The force of the train going down the grade could be recycled through the drive motors of the engine. Reversing an electric motor makes it into a generator. It could be used to pump power back into the system to be used when going uphill. Approximately 40 per cent of the power requirement could be recovered by that method and result in further savings.

There is maybe an even more important benefit when it comes to the digging of long tunnels through mountain passes, something that we are now in the process of doing. The use of electric trains would do away with the problem of ventilating diesel fumes. A tunnel nine, ten or 12 miles long requires a very expensive ventilating system. This is necessary for the survival of the train crew. The system being put in the Rogers Pass requires a large ventilator stack. The most logical place for that stack cuts off the view of Rogers Pass from the highway. A stack will be in the way.

This ventilating system will require a continuously operating 11,000 horsepower fan, which will require more power than is required to move a train through that tunnel. In order to ventilate the tunnel, it will require a great amount of energy. This could have been avoided by a more sensible, forward, modern approach of electrifying the trains on the mainline through the mountain passes.

Instead of taking a progressive, modernistic kind of approach, the government has opted for a neo-capitalist approach. It intends to go back to the old days, making the current technology limp along for a few more years.

• (1610)

The railways have been insisting on a cost formula which Hall found quite unacceptable. They have been insisting on a recovery of costs which will give them many times the current Crow rate, and in some cases the figures which have been generated would even exceed the current so-called competitive rate.

As Hall said in his report, we are also saying that any public funds pumped into the railways should be accounted for as part of the public contribution. That seems to be fairly straightforward and to make ultimate common sense, but that is not the route the department and the government seem to be following when they put forward their cost survey and cost formula.

We note that branch line rehabilitation has continued. The purchase of hopper cars by provincial governments, farmers and the federal government has continued, and we note with some pleasure that the switch to hopper cars will increase rail capacity by about 40 per cent. The limiting factor on current trains is not the amount of weight transferred but, more properly, the number of cars being pulled. If we can put 40 per cent more grain or any other commodity on a car, we are increasing the total capacity of the train. The move to hopper cars and the enhanced ability of branch lines to handle those hopper cars will increase grain hauling capacity by 40 per cent. We are saying that on top of that we could add another 50 per cent to the rate of rail movement by electrifying the trains.

We note that there has been a lot of delay in the progress of implementing the Hall recommendations. The government has chosen not to implement a subsidy program so that the railways can cover the so-called losses they are encountering. There has not been a policy to consider as equity financing the public funds which have gone to the railways. They are always considered by the railways as just gifts from the government. The people of Canada have contributed money to the railways to enable them to build up their hopper car fleets, to improve their locomotives a number of years ago, to rebuild branch lines, to build tunnels through the mountains and to upgrade the track in that area of the country. At no time have the railways considered that as equity financing, but we think that would make very good sense. We think it is a progressive idea for those government funds to be considered as equity financing so that when dividends are declared, those funds become part of company dividends, and the country receives financial benefits. In addition, the country would have more influence on the boards of directors of the railways, particularly the CPR, of which we have little control now.

In spite of the moves which have been made on the Crow rate over the past winter and the implementation and setting up of the Gilson inquiry—I suppose we could call it a process—and in spite of the leaks which have come out of that process which indicate that there will probably be a very vast change in the rate structure farmers in western Canada will have, if we can believe the news reports which came out of Saskatoon yesterday, implementation of the Hall report would