

Western Grain Transportation Act

certain vested interests and the Quebec caucus. The Quebec caucus was under pressure from its farmers because the Quebec provincial Government has embarked upon a distortion of the raising of beef in this country by outsized subsidies, then insisting that there shall be low rates on feed grain.

Over the past ten years in my city I have seen the closing of packing plants and the laying off of work forces, not in the hundreds but in the thousands. Unfortunately, that has been proportionately portrayed in all major western centres and in many smaller ones as well. What should be the heartland of beef raising and processing in this country is now in a very sad state. We do not get anything better out of it, that is the point. We sell a lot of cattle for export to the United States. However, if the western cattle industry is reduced, there will not be that volume of stock to sell to the United States. This volume has been traditional and will not in any way be replaced from Ontario and Quebec surplus beef. It is a fool-headed exercise to try and distort the development of beef in eastern Canada. That is only one of the results.

I cannot see loading down the railways systems with excessively high costs of maintaining rights-of-way to everywhere if it is only to haul grain. There must be some better way of moving grain, such as changing the elevator system. That is part of the rationalization. I find the attitude of the NDP and its agricultural affiliate, the NFU, to be tantamount to the Luddites in so far as the movement of grain and freight rates in western Canada are concerned.

Let us look at what the Alberta Cattle Commission says. The Alberta Beef Bulletin of May, 1983 begins with this desperate cry:

• (1150)

The Federal Government has announced it will adopt a 'pay-the-railways' solution to the Crow rate issue, despite the advice of economists and consultants, despite the advice of Dr. Clay Gilson who was appointed by the Government to advise it on Crow reform, despite the advice of its own Transport Minister Jean-Luc Pepin, despite the fact paying the Crow benefit to the railways will continue and accelerate the damage being done to the livestock and secondary processing industries in the West, despite the fact the Government is told Canada will get a less efficient and more expensive grain handling system for its tax dollars, despite, despite, despite.

Quebec has been integral in scuttling the Gilson and Pepin plans. Certainly producers and the Provincial Government are aware of the distortions and damage created by the artificially low Crow rate. Certainly Quebec is aware that, while increasing grain transportation rates would allow more market-fair prices on the Prairies, a 'pay-the-producer' solution to Crow reform would not change their feed grain prices. Certainly Quebec has been told that the anticipated increase in livestock production in the West which would follow a Gilson or Pepin type solution, would be exported and not affect Quebec markets. Quebec may not believe this, but the exports are already occurring. Certainly Quebec is aware of all these facts, and it is equally certain Quebec could not care less.

So Quebec has wielded its considerable political clout and the Federal Government has bowed to it and sold out the Western livestock industry. According to the Government's own publications, the Crow is costing the West \$150 million annually. Yet the Government will move to preserve the system which creates the losses and will see a systematic erosion of the livestock sector in the West.

The last point I should like to make, Mr. Speaker, is that I do not think the railways should receive all the subsidies. A former minister of transport, Jean Marchand, was asked about the role of the railways at the Western Economic Conference and he insisted that they would open their books, but they have

consistently refused to do so. In my opinion the railways must come clean on the matter of costs. I do not believe they can show figures. We have never had one iota of real information from either the CNR or the CPR. They have some excess feather-bedding around in their systems which they have charged up in the same way as they charged rail transport to VIA Rail, thus booming the cost of passenger traffic. Not one page of justification for those costs filed by the railways has ever been shown to us.

If there is going to be any benefit to the railways—and undoubtedly there will be—by the improvement of their facilities and the twinning of track where necessary and so forth, they have an obligation to come clean with the people of Canada and their customers. They must establish a trust between themselves and us. Before we pay anything they must exhibit a better attitude.

I am opposed to this Bill, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gordon Towers (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, once again it is with sadness that I stand to speak to a Government proposal. It seems there is a continuation of these things that divide our country but it is possible that the Government has never done anything to divide the country as much as this Bill will. It is ironic that the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) and the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) have been able to alienate western Canadians so quickly.

For a time a lot of residents and farmers in western Canada thought they had a friend in the Minister of Transport but at the flick of a switch he turned his back and walked away from them. It would have been far better if he had never said he was going to do something for western Canada. At the present time he has alienated everybody.

At first there was a division of opinion between grain growers and the red meat producers but now they have come together to object to the Minister's proposal. The President of the United Grain Growers would not attend the latest meeting with the Prime Minister in Jasper because he had already said he was not going to change his position. It is just ludicrous for the Prime Minister to meet representatives of agriculture in western Canada if he is not going to make some changes to the proposals the Government presented to them. That makes the producers in western Canada very, very angry. As well, it will have a devastating effect on the economy of the western agricultural community.

When the Government brought in the National Energy Program we warned it of the effect the program would have not just in western Canada but also in eastern Canada. That warning has proven to be true. Now we find the Minister of Transport proposing another program that will have a devastating effect on western Canada, a program which could be likened to the National Energy Program.

Several proposals have been made. First, there was the report of Mr. Justice Emmett Hall which was discussed at length. Then we had the Snaveley report which was also discussed at length; and now there is the Gilson report. The three reports were presented to the House; all were discarded and