

*Western Grain Transportation Act*

Seattle, a distance of 900 miles from eastern Montana. Is he aware of all that, even though the American railways and the truckers get the full commercial rates?

Is the Hon. Member saying that Canadian farmers should pay full commercial rates to haul grain, not in Canada but in the United States? Is that what he is saying? He had another alternative, namely dirigibles. I guess every farmer should have his own balloon. As long as we have enough Tories around to provide the hot air to fill them, they will be able to haul grain in hot-air balloons. Surely the Hon. Member cannot be serious in this day and age about that kind of alternative.

**Mr. Thacker:** Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member shows a paucity of confusion. I am saying that if we adopt a truly competitive system, people will be free to choose and have the economic strength to do it because it will bring money in their pockets. They will come up with all sorts of ideas. It will be exactly what happened in the 1700s. We finally got away from state capitalism in the forms of kings and monarchs and put the capital into millions of individuals pieces and let individuals make decisions. We created more wealth in this country and in the western world than had been created in the history of mankind. Now we are getting back to state capitalism, except that it is in the form of elected Cabinets. The Hon. Member does not have the vision to imagine what could happen in terms of pipelines, dirigibles or whatever it might be. I used that as an example.

**Mr. Doug Neil (Moose Jaw):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity of participating in this debate because, for the people of western Canada, it is the most important debate in the lifetime of Canada and specifically in their lifetime. This Bill proposes to change radically a historic agreement, the Crowsnest Pass Agreement of 1897, which was enshrined in statute in 1925.

That statutory rate guarantees to the producers of western Canada a freight rate of one-half cent per mile for the movement of certain grains. What the Minister is proposing in this Bill is a very radical change. It is changing a historical agreement, one that the western grain producers have depended upon all their lives.

The Minister said that we should pass this Bill in all its stages by June 30. We are involved in the second reading. There will be committee hearings and then third reading. Why does he want it passed by June 30? He says he wants the new rates to be effective for the next crop year which starts August 1. I wonder how vital it is that this legislation be passed so hurriedly. The rates have been in effect for some 86 years. The railways have not fared too badly until the last few years. At the expense of the Government of Canada or of the grain producers, the railroads were given 15,280 hopper cars. The Government of Canada has indicated that it would supply to them, without cost, an additional 3,840 cars in the years 1982 to 1985. Over the years they have been paid substantial branch line subsidies, all taxpayers' money. The Prairie branch line rehabilitation program has supplied the railways with some \$402 million to date. In his announcement, the Minister

indicated that another \$670 million will be provided for branch line rehabilitation to the end of the decade.

• (1750)

No one argues, Mr. Speaker, that these programs are not necessary, but why the rush? Why does the legislation have to be passed by June 30? Of course, the Minister will argue that all of the interested agricultural organizations have had the opportunity of input into Dr. Gilson's study, and that there is really no need to go into an extensive study about how the Parties feel about the change. I would point out to the Minister that Parliament and parliamentarians were not privy to the Gilson hearings.

The feelings of the participants in the Gilson hearings were far from unanimous. What Dr. Gilson brought down in his report was a compromise, or what he felt was in the best interests of the agricultural community. There was a situation where some favoured the Gilson report and some did not. So what happened? There were rumblings from eastern Canada, particularly from Quebec, so the Minister flew a trial balloon. In February of this year, he went to western Canada and made a big announcement. He called it the western transportation initiative. I point out that he made this announcement in Winnipeg, not in Parliament where it should have been made and where Members of Parliament would have had the opportunity of commenting on it and asking him questions, about it.

In his announcement of his western transportation initiatives, he changed Gilson's recommendation that the railway should receive 19 per cent and the producers should receive 18 per cent. He compromised and said, "Okay, we will make it fifty-fifty because there is some concern." At the same time, he and other Ministers made pronouncements of other massive amounts of money that would be spent throughout Canada. That is bribery. He talked about a \$3.7 billion program, and really, if you read the report of the Transport Committee of April 26, 1983, where the Member for Kindersley-Lloydminster (Mr. McKnight), questioned Mr. N. Mulder, the Administrator of Canadian Surface Transportation, Transport Canada, Mr. Mulder admitted that the \$3.7 billion that the Minister was talking about would come from the Western Development Fund, money that belonged to western Canadians, money taken from western Canada. The Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) and the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) stood up and tried to pretend that they were giving western Canada something when what in fact they were doing was giving westerners back their own money, taking it from one pocket and putting it into the other.

Even with this bribery and this promise of all that money, the Minister was still in trouble, so then he tried an \$850,000 advertising campaign. He advertised in the newspapers in the East and in the West. He even persuaded the Minister of Agriculture to contribute some \$200,000 from the agricultural budget to help him in his advertising campaign. He was supported by "Big Daddy", the Minister of Agriculture, the man with the green hat who is the friend of the farmer. The Minister of Agriculture was out there selling the program as