

Western Grain Transportation Act

that in this motion we have come to terms with the very important social reality which could have great influence in the Province in which I live. Transportation has been the backbone of life in Saskatchewan since I was a child, and will continue to be so I am sure. The distances one must travel in Saskatchewan are unique. The pioneers who came to the country realized that unless there was an adequate transportation system put in place, they could not continue to exist there.

● (1115)

Today we are discussing a Bill dealing with the essence of that lifestyle which was built on the growing and transportation of grain. The motion we are advancing ensures that truckers will not be subsidized for carrying grain in areas where there is existing railroad transportation. To my mind that has a very reasonable ring to it. The transportation system in western Canada is what you might call the arteries of the economic life of western Canada. This motion is attempting to sustain that economic life system.

If a person has had an opportunity to visit Europe or other countries, he will find there are different ways to move things, naturally. The easiest way to move large-scale products like grain or ore is by water. Unfortunately, Saskatchewan does not have that system.

Mr. Malone: Saskatchewan canal.

Mr. Ogle: My colleague from Alberta suggests we build a Saskatchewan canal. I think that would only be an Alberta idea; we could not possibly do that in Saskatchewan. However, the most economic way of moving goods is by water through canals and rivers.

The second most economical way to move large quantities of goods is by rail; there is no question about that. If a person has had the opportunity to visit Europe, he will see that the Europeans have engineered their rivers and canals. Indeed, they have set up a network in almost the whole of Europe in which water is the major transportation mode. However, in parallel to that, double-railed all the time, they have the rail transportation system. Economically that is the simplest way to move heavy, bulky products like grain or ore, plus passengers or anything else which has to be moved in a particular direction at a particular time. They have a trucking system but that is at the bottom; it is not the lifeblood of the whole system. I think in North America there has always been a very strong automotive lobby which has pushed the production of automobiles and trucks out of proportion to their value in the long run. That lobby has forced many places to build road systems to carry that traffic.

However, Mr. Speaker, this motion simply says that we do not want a subsidy to be paid to truckers for trucking grain in areas where there is an existing rail line. We feel, and I think rightly believe, that will bring about the abandonment of particular rail lines. When that happens—and I can use many examples from Saskatchewan, when railroad lines are abandoned and track is pulled out—the lives of the people who live along that particular area are changed. They are changed in a

way which causes them to abandon their homes. It means the abandonment of schools and social structures that are part and parcel of the province from which I come.

● (1120)

Also, I would like clearly to mark out that the reason we are proposing the motion is that we are basically thinking of the farmer, the person who is at the bottom, for whom the whole structure has been set up. The farmer who is at the bottom will be the last one to be protected in the Bill. What we are requesting is that the farmer be the first one to be looked after in the Bill, because the trucking system will not be set up to help the farmer. As we know now, if the motion is not carried, most of the trucking firms that will get the work will be the big trucking companies, many times also operated by the railroad. Therefore, a subsidy would be going to those very routes that would be least interested in keeping the railroad in that particular place.

I call upon my colleagues in the House and all those who are concerned with the welfare of the western Canadian farmer in the rural areas of Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba to consider seriously what we are proposing here, and to use the power of Parliament to carry the motion that we have proposed to ensure that the rail lines will not be abandoned because of something that is legislated in the House.

Mr. Jim Manly (Cowichan-Malahat-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, like my colleagues, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Motion No. 34, which would eliminate Subclause (4) of Clause 17. Subclause (4) allows the Administrator, on behalf of the Minister, to enter into agreements to provide for the movement of grain by motor vehicle transport where, in his opinion, such agreements would be in the best interests of the grain producers.

It is the contention of our Party that such agreements would never be in the best interests of the grain producers and certainly would not be in the best interests of the many communities across the Prairies, because, in effect, Subclause (4) would facilitate branch line abandonment on the Prairies. This would have disastrous effects on a great many Prairie communities.

I think all Hon. Members in the House are aware that branch line abandonment is not a new phenomenon. It is something that the railways have been attempting for years, something at which they have been disastrously successful. Branch line abandonment is not a phenomenon that is limited to the Prairies. In the last two years, in my own riding on Vancouver Island, there have been attempts by both Canadian National and Canadian Pacific to abandon branch lines to Lake Cowichan. In the submissions that I have made at different times to try to prevent such abandonment, I have pointed out the effects that this would have on our communities.

The increased movement of lumber by truck would mean that already crowded highways would be further crowded and the cost of highway building would be shifted directly on to the taxpayers of British Columbia. The Social Credit Government