

Railway Act

Canada. The Eastern farmers were asked to believe that if to get the same grade of feed grains they had to pay higher prices than the Western farmers, it was because of transportation costs from the West to the East, even though Parliament had passed legislation providing for a grant to compensate for this price differential. Of course, that grant did not always provide a fair compensation, but at least it was available and its aim was to establish a reasonable balance between production costs for Western feed grains and Eastern grains.

● (2250)

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, as representatives in this Parliament, I and several of my colleagues did not always get the necessary information to be able to ascertain whether the subsidy did reflect the difference in prices, with the effect of giving eastern and western farmers equal chances.

If this bill is a means of obtaining information, as the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) said earlier, while another act is still to come later, then we shall be in a position to use Bill C-48 to clear up a lot of questions which might be of some concern not only to Members of Parliament but also to taxpayers and those in the production business, whether in the furniture industry or in the production of pork, eggs, poultry or dairy products which have to travel throughout the country. If this bill can enable us to force transportation companies to provide Parliament with real information on the cost of transportation, on the revenues accrued, and we eventually manage to determine whether there really are profits or losses, I think it will have been worth waiting a little bit later tonight to pass this bill and let it become a reality as soon as possible so as to enable the Minister of Transport to give us more information.

I trust that the Minister of Transport will be honest and another bill will be introduced in the House. Hon. members will then be able to inquire deeper into the activities of railway companies and the effective cost to taxpayers of this public service which is essential for the development of our country.

Madam Speaker, I have always considered that railway transportation services are a must for our country as a whole and that Canadian people are willing to assume the costs of that transportation provided it benefits the development of our industries throughout Canada and they do not have to pay twice as much for a service that can be obtained at a lower cost.

I therefore commend Bill C-48 with all my heart.

[*English*]

Mr. Leonard C. Jones (Moncton): Madam Speaker, I suppose at this hour of the night I should give the benediction, the blessing, and go home; but that is not quite all. Certainly Bill C-48, on reading it, is self-explanatory. After all I have heard tonight, in the interests of fairness, time and expediency, I do not intend at this time to pass judgment on the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) or his department.

Certainly the matter of disclosure by the railway companies is a serious business. They are public utilities and their costs of operations should be public knowledge. Certainly the bill should go further and I trust that the committee will cause amendments to be made to make it more forceful and meaningful, and report it back to this House forthwith.

This question of transportation is of the utmost importance in the minds of all Canadians, including those in this House. The government must get on the right track, and get off cloud nine. I come from a railroad town and I know some of the problems in transportation at first hand. The transportation problems in our country must be given priority of solution. This is a most essential prerequisite of our confederation, and the survival of our economy and our people depends in large part on straightening out the transportation system, once and for all, so we can then proceed to achieve greater heights in confederation, in unifying our country, and in eliminating regional disparities.

We must have a policy and a plan, and we must be prepared to follow that policy and that plan. Transportation must be treated as a service to the public, not as a business. Until we realize that philosophy as the basis of policies to be drafted in respect of transportation, we will never really correct the difficulties. I am sure that we, in this House of Commons at this session, can straighten out most of those problems.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Morin): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said motion?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Morin): Pursuant to an order made earlier today, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at two o'clock.

At 11 p.m. the House adjourned, without question put, pursuant to Special Order.