

Transportation

Hon. members will have to excuse me for speaking a little warmly about this but I think we ought to face the facts in this matter and not be afraid of them. You know, Mr. Chairman, this great wheat economy in western Canada is responsible for the fact that we have a country. If the Fathers of Confederation had been wrong, if this great area that a lot of people did not believe was worth anything had proven not to be worth anything, do you think British Columbia would have remained in confederation very long, with all that distance in between?

We had a poor period in the 1930's, and perhaps we had some doubts in the late 1950's and early 1960's. But let nobody make any mistake about it: With the way the population of the west is growing at the present time, and with the tremendous technological advances there have been in agriculture and in transport, the west will continue to progress.

I do not say that all years will be equally good. The hon. member for Assiniboia would tell me I was an utter fool if I said that. I too was brought up on a farm and I know you cannot get good crops every year. But we all know that wheat is going to continue to be grown in western Canada and that we are skilled enough to get it to the markets without it being a drag on the taxpayers. The world is going to need that wheat so much that, so far ahead as I can see, western Canada is going to be a pillar of this country.

Mr. Fane: "Going to be"? We are.

Mr. Watson (Assiniboia): Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the minister for his comments. During the first minute or two that he was speaking I thought his speech was starting to make a little sense, but after listening to him for ten minutes I came to the conclusion that the same thing is wrong with the bill as was wrong with what we have just heard: There is so much in it that we really do not know what is in it.

This new section says that not later than three years after it comes into force the commission shall inquire into the revenues and costs of railway companies. That is just opening up another keg of worms.

Not only the farmers of Saskatchewan but the people of western Canada decided eight or ten years ago that they had no faith in the party forming this government, and this is just another item of business in which we have no faith. Just today I received three letters, not pertaining entirely to railway legislation, but all saying, "I am a Liberal," or

[Mr. Pickersgill.]

this that and the other thing, "but I have lost faith in what the government has done within the last little while."

What the farmers and many other people want is good, plain, simple legislation that they can understand. If we agree that the Crowsnest pass rates are right, then there is no necessity for this new section. We do not need to examine them in three years, five years or ten years time. I only wish that the railways would produce sets of figures that an ordinary man, or a lawyer or accountant could understand. The railways have nothing to hide, but their figures should be put in terms that we can understand.

A day or two ago when I was speaking about rail line abandonment I gave figures with respect to a 26 mile stretch of railway. The actual cost for transporting grain in 25 trips on that stretch of line was \$5,800. The revenues were \$110,000. But after the railway got through with its figures, both off line and on line, they came up with a cost of \$177,000. It is absolutely ridiculous to start talking in those terms. We need a formula that we can understand. Until we have a formula which says A plus B equals C we are not going to be able to trust any figures pertaining to rail line abandonment or to the Crowsnest pass rates.

I give the example of a regular way-freight operation running into my home town and down into the southern part of Saskatchewan. There are two trains a week, but last year the amount of grain shipped out averaged just a little better than 6 cars per train. A thing like that is the reason why it is costing the railways so much money. The whole method of operating is wrong. We need an efficient manner of operating. No farmer today could operate under the system we are maintaining for our railways and make a decent living. Automation and modern facilities are required.

• (8:40 p.m.)

We have our large modern diesel engines. Let us modernize the other grain handling facilities so that we can get down to a point where the grain is handled efficiently. Then there never should be any question about the Crowsnest pass rates. When we look at the farming situation in the west today we can see that the small farmers are having difficulties. The way to carry out this operation is on a bigger scale so that there is greater efficiency. The railways are big. They have no competition. There are only the two railways in Canada and they have the grain business entirely sewn up. There is no reason why they