

Canada Grain Act

proportions the railways would like to see it reach. Actually, what the bill does is to leave out five or six words that are in the act to the effect that such an elevator must discharge grain directly into railway cars or vessels.

As the hon. member for Essex South (Mr. Whelan) pointed out, few off-track elevators are licensed. The hon. member for Essex South showed some ignorance of the grain handling facilities when he said that a 250 million bushel capacity would handle a 700 million bushel crop. Where would the extra grain be stored? It would be stored on the farms. Any farmer will tell you that one only has to go back to the fifties to find that it was obvious that farm stored grain, while it was like money in the bank, did cause many farmers to sell their grain at what one might call depressed prices. If they had only waited, they would have obtained the wheat board price for it. If the amount of storage space available for grain were cut down, this would be a retrograde step. Actually this would happen if rail line abandonment were given effect to the extent the railways want it, and if the grain act were not amended to allow off-track elevators to be licensed.

Some years ago in Winnipeg the chairman of the Canadian National made a speech about grain handling. He suggested that the elevator companies, the railroads and the farmers, the people concerned, should get together and study the grain handling facilities. He felt that 100,000 bushels of grain could be moved 50 miles on either side of the main line easier by truck than it is moved now by rail. Many of these lines could be abandoned and the grain could be moved by truck. He did not go so far as to suggest that the farmers should be moving the grain themselves that extra 50 miles, but he did suggest that the three parties concerned should get together and perhaps a trucking fleet could be devised to move the grain. If this is true, then surely off-track elevators should be licensed.

As I say, the hon. member for Essex South thought there was enough storage capacity and that the elevator grain system was now over-extended. This was not true a few years ago when the box car commission investigated grain handling facilities and grain storage capacity on the prairies. This was not the situation when we had to institute cash advances on farm stored grain. Certainly we must proceed and let experience be our guide. Experience with grain handling facilities does not suggest that grain storage capacity is

[Mr. Horner (Acadia).]

necessarily overextended. It does not suggest, to me at least, that a 250 million bushel capacity can handle a 700 million bushel crop year in and year out without putting an added burden on the farmers. They are the ones who would have to store the grain.

The present Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Sharp) well knows the difficulties experienced in the middle fifties with regard to farm stored grain. They tried making payments on it in one form or another in an effort to compensate for what we might call this underdeveloped grain storage system. When we are discussing this bill, we are not saying that we should go back to the middle fifties and license all the community curling rinks, skating rinks or abandoned airplane hangars for the handling of grain. We are saying that an elevator should be able to obtain a licence to handle and store grain on wheat board storage tickets, but it should be an elevator, not a skating rink or a curling rink. An elevator has facilities to move grain and turn it. The only reason grain could not be kept in other storage is that it cannot be turned if it is slightly heated or if mice and termites get into it. Therefore there is no reason why an elevator could not be chosen as a good storage place, no matter whether it is sitting beside a railroad or 15 miles away from one.

As the hon. member for Medicine Hat pointed out so aptly, there are many other specifications to be taken into consideration. This bill may not be passed today but it will certainly be considered when the railway committee studies Bill C-120.

The railroads propose to abandon 4,000 miles of track in the prairie provinces and this might envision the abandonment of 700, 800 or possibly 1,000 elevators. What will happen then if, as Mr. Gordon says, grain can be moved cheaper by truck over short distances? Why shouldn't elevators on abandoned railway lines be allowed to continue in business? As road networks improve trucks will be able to handle the grain.

Although he did not say so, Mr. Gordon may prefer to use a fleet of trucks rather than a diesel locomotive. In fact the railways are fast moving into the trucking field. Perhaps this is what he envisions when he says a whole new grain transportation system should be devised.

Mr. Sharp: I was very interested in the comments the hon. member was making but I wonder is he satisfied that Bill C-70 would achieve what he is speaking of now? Would