

Western Grain Transportation Act

Mr. Korchinski: Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether the Hon. Member knows this or not, but my father once worked on the railway, so I feel quite safe in commenting on the railroad workers. I also remember strikes, Mr. Speaker, and after the strike was settled, after Members of Parliament had to come back and introduce legislation to put these people back to work because of the tie-up in transportation, the first thing that happened was that the railway companies immediately went to work and started cutting down on the number of people they employed. They did so because if they had to pay these people the amount of money they had agreed on they would have to find it somewhere. The end result was that very soon unemployment increased, attrition increased and soon the day came when the railways started buying bigger units. They were forced into that. After a while these workers would talk about a strike, but they would suddenly pull back.

I am sure we all can recall that that is precisely what happened a few years ago. Although they threatened to strike, they soon realized that after they had struck the first time, they were sent back to work, but the railways in the end became more and more efficient and the workers eventually lost their jobs. So while they threatened and used every mechanism possible, they then turned around and agreed to terms which were acceptable to them and to the employer.

Mr. Orlikow: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member talks about the increased efficiency of the railways which led to less employment. Of course that happened. In the same way, with the increased efficiency on the farms we have seen the disappearance of the quarter-section farm, then there was the half-section, the one-section and now we have farms which are two, three, four sections and bigger.

I would like to ask the Hon. Member one specific question so we will get the record straight. Does the Hon. Member not realize that the substantial majority of the railway workers make less than \$20,000, probably closer to \$15,000 a year which, the cost of living being what it is today, does not give them a very high standard of living? Should he not modify that figure of \$52,000 which he ascribes to the engineers and, by implication, leaving the impression that nearly all railway workers receive over \$50,000 a year?

Mr. Korchinski: Mr. Speaker, I am not commenting on any other wage or salary. I make reference to one particular group. I believe that the Hon. Member should be fair about it. I realize that there are people who are making less, but I am suggesting to the Hon. Member that that is a factor. I believe he should be fair about it because nobody dares to talk about things like that. All they will talk about is Macdonald's salary, and so on, and I even hear comments about the salary of Members of Parliament. I am suggesting here that these people are making more than a Member of Parliament.

Mr. Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I believe it is unfortunate that the Hon. Member for Mackenzie (Mr. Korchinski) has chosen this opportunity of a debate on the change in the Crow rate to vent his spleen about grievances he has against railway workers

over the years. I would remind the Hon. Member that we have not had a strike for ten years. The last strike occurred in 1973, the one previous to that was in 1966, and I believe the strike before that was in 1951. There have been three strikes during my lifetime, which is not very many.

• (1550)

Indeed, many of the railway workers were born and raised on farms in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. They know the world of agriculture.

Mr. Thacker: Question.

Mr. Blaikie: The Hon. Member for Lethbridge-Foothills (Mr. Thacker) was a member of the committee for parliamentary reform so he should know that this is a time not just for questions but also for comments.

Mr. Thacker: Short and succinct.

Mr. Blaikie: Perhaps he would be quiet and let me make my comments. I think it is very unfortunate that the Hon. Member for Mackenzie is trying to drive a wedge between railway workers and grain producers in this country. We know of the difficulties and tensions that have arisen during times when the railways have gone on strike. No one has experienced that more painfully than my own Party which was originally a coalition of farmers and workers. I think the Hon. Member for Mackenzie is completely wrong in using this debate as an opportunity to try to aggravate those tensions when I sincerely believe that railway workers want to see justice done to the Canadian farmer and will support the retention of the Crow rate as long as the railways receive the money necessary, as would happen under our plan for upgrading rail lines.

Mr. Kristiansen: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Hon. Member for Mackenzie. Is he really so naive—I am using the term politely—to believe that a corporation like the CPR, knowing that it can use technology to reduce its labour content and become more competitive, would restrain itself from taking those cost-cutting and efficient measures simply because it does not want to reduce the number of employees it has out of the goodness of its heart? That was the obvious suggestion in his remarks when he said that the railway only modernizes and reduces its labour content after a strike or a set of negotiations which raises labour costs.

Does he really believe that Canadian Pacific or any other major private employer is so financially stupid or irresponsible to its shareholders that it will not utilize whatever modern means are available at any time in order to reduce its costs and become more competitive in its business?

Mr. Korchinski: Mr. Speaker, I am neither naive nor stupid because I realize that the railways will be efficient since they have done that very thing over the years. CN would not come before Parliament asking for \$600 million, or whatever its shortfall is, without expecting Members of Parliament to ask it whether it has attempted to become more efficient.