

Supply

those lines is in the neighbourhood of 11.7 million bushels of grain.

I listened to members of the Tory party speaking in this committee on the agriculture estimates. They mentioned transportation. I know some of them belong to a particular type of organization that talks of abandoning 30, 40 or 50 country elevators in any given area. I also know that in Assiniboia constituency during the election the Conservative candidate said, "We will not abandon any of your rail lines. We will not permit the 5,100 farmers served by branch lines in Assiniboia to be left without rail service." That candidate and others suggested that the government should build 18 inland terminals and close certain country elevators. Farmers in western Canada can put two and two together. They should realize that the Tory party and some of the members who support it, particularly in Saskatchewan, want nothing more than the wholesale abandonment of those lines. That policy is not different from the one followed by this government in rail line abandonment. Let the hon. member for Vegreville not doubt that the Tory government would abandon those lines. We have listened to his party spokesmen and know what they recommend in Saskatchewan in terms of rail line abandonment.

I could educate members from British Columbia as to why some of us in the west do not vote for the Tory party.

Mr. Mazankowski: You are fighting for your political life, and you know it.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, when I ran in the byelection they said I was fighting for my political life, that the Tories or Grits would get me, but I took care of them. In the general election I was also told that the Tories or Grits would get me, I was too young; yet here I am. I took care of them. I tell my hon. friend that in the next general election, in Assiniboia, or whatever the name of the riding may be, Bill Knight—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: Let's talk about hopper cars.

The Assistant Deputy Chairman: Order, please. The hon. member knows the rules. He should refer to the item before us.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, I wanted members of the committee to know of the difficulties they will encounter in presenting certain policies on transportation to the producers of Assiniboia. Those policies with respect to transport interest all the producers of western Canada. I think I have made my point.

In Assiniboia an experiment in trucking grain was undertaken. Frankly, it was a good experiment. After cleaning some barley, it was trucked from inland terminals right through to Vancouver. I say to those who feel that it would be better to truck grain to large terminals, then load it unto unit trains and move it to the coast after it has been screened, that we have not been given a detailed cost study of such a project. All we were told, Mr. Chairman, was that this process was costing the farmer more than if he were using the railways and country elevators. I do not think that is good enough. I think the

[Mr. Knight.]

minister in charge of the Wheat Board and those members of that "think tank", the Canada Grains Council, should appear before the Committee on Agriculture and explain to western producers or their representatives what exactly are the cost factors involved in the running of the system. What are the cost factors in using trucks, in using hopper cars and in using unit trains to run to the west coast. I do not think we have been given an adequate explanation.

• (1500)

An inland terminal using a trucking method can be used along with hopper cars and unit trains. This might save producers money and increase the efficiency of moving grain. There is certainly some room to allow for the movement of a top grade of wheat. The sorry situation dealing with this estimate on hopper cars points out the bankruptcy of the national government, regardless of which old-line party is in power, in terms of producing a transportation policy for the producers of western Canada and, in fact, people in all of Canada.

Mr. Nielsen: Vote against the item.

Mr. Knight: It is no solution to merely offer much needed hopper cars. That is a piecemeal solution. It is another subsidy. Once a year we give the CNR a subsidy. Last year we gave both the CNR and CPR a subsidy by supplying them with cars. This points out that there is no national direction in the area of transportation.

The Speech from the Throne set out that there will be a meeting in western Canada to discuss our transportation problems. The Minister of Regional Economic Expansion forgets that when he was Minister of Transport not once did he speak of equalizing freight rates in this country so that those in the west could develop secondary manufacturing industry. Not once did he mention an equalization of the freight rate structure.

What we need is a federal government that will tackle the railways in relation to providing service to the producers. We need a railroad commitment of providing rolling stock, not a government that bails them out when the going gets rough, gives them 2,000 hopper cars and still allows them to lease cars to the United States. The government allows the railways to use Canadian cars to haul American grain over Canadian rail lines to American ports to go to American customers. They do not even know about it, much less care. You cannot build a national transportation policy by adhering to the idea that in order to save yourself in a general election you should supply 2,000 hopper cars to western Canada.

What we need is to attack the problem of upgrading the track and the elevator system. There is no question that between Weyburn and Yellow Grass there are about four elevators within sight of each other. There is no argument there. Where the argument comes is in an over-all program such as in a task force report or the report coming out of this "think tank" called the Canada Grains Council, or the Canada Grains Group which came up with the idea of banning them and not keeping up the track. That is where the area of massive transportation in western Canada falls down. With the removal of the pools from the Canada Grains Council as well the National Farmers'