

Western Grain Transportation Act

not quite sure whether he was consistent with the position of others of his colleagues in this debate, but I want to say that the New Democratic Party has every reason to cry. Members of that Party have been all over the field and reversing themselves on every issue respecting the Crow rate, to the point where yesterday we saw the Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin) revert to an unusual position. They said that they would kill the Bill and do everything in their power to bring the House to a halt. Suddenly that Hon. Member rose in his place and, in one of the most outstanding and unusual speeches in this place, said, "Mr. Speaker, we now want this matter to go to committee". What is that Party up to in terms of consistency of position? Does it know where it is going? Is it going only one place, from 16 per cent down to a lower position in the polls?

I remind the House that we are now faced with an additional indication of the attitude of the Government toward this very important issue. The Hon. Member for Rosemont (Mr. Lachance) stood in his place yesterday and, once again by direction from his Party hierarchy, moved that the question be now put. It was another indication that his Party wanted to shut down debate in the House of Commons on an issue which everyone who has spoken has pointed out is the Magna Carta of western Canada.

Another indication is time allocation or closure. The Minister has been carrying on negotiations behind closed doors with respect to a matter which is important right across Canada but is particularly important to western Canada. He carried on these closed door negotiations with a select few groups of people, and has come forward and sprung on the people of Canada and the House of Commons the "Pepin" proposal and the legislation we are now considering. From the time that legislation was sprung upon us, we have been faced with threats to terminate the debate and to limit the debate. More important, of greatest concern to me is that this signals to us in the House of Commons what will happen if and when the Bill gets to committee for consideration.

● (1130)

We have not had any commitment from the Minister and the Government that there will be a free and fair opportunity for Members of the House of Commons on the committee to travel across Canada, as we did with respect to the Western Grain Stabilization legislation, giving an opportunity to people with very different interests to make representations to a parliamentary committee. We have no commitment. The only indication we have is that the Government is determined to ram this legislation through, to impose closure at committee stage, to ram it through the summer months without any opportunity for input, meaningful consideration or, if necessary, amendments to improve this very faulty legislation.

I say to the Minister in all seriousness that if he has any interest in terms of getting this matter dealt with in a fair and reasonable manner, he will take the step of giving a clear and unequivocal statement that a committee which considers this

matter, if we reach that point, will have a free and open opportunity to receive representations from legitimate interest groups across the country and that we will have a reasonable period of time in which to carry on deliberations.

When I last spoke in this debate on May 16, the Minister had not yet presented his amendments to the Bill. At that time we had a vague promise from the Minister on a safety net that would be established. We now know that the safety net will link freight rates to the weighted average price of the six major grains. The second amendment added certain crops and products to the list of the commodities which may be shipped under the statutory rate. There are other crops that should have been included, and it appears the Government will have to be dragged into including a proper list of crops to be covered by this rate.

The introduction of these amendments, while it is in one sense a sign that the Government is very slowly realizing the impact that this legislation will have on western Canada, particularly on the producers, is really insufficient, to answer the needs of western producers. It is important that the rate be tied to the price of grain. Farmers today are simply not in a position to contribute additional funds for grain transportation.

This safety net is fixed at 10 per cent of the weighted average price, which means that farmers will probably be paying the same amount under the plan by 1990-91 as they would under the previous proposal. While in theory it may be a rational approach to tie the rate to the price of grain, the actual proposal still deals a body blow to the pocketbooks of western farmers. It is unacceptable. It is nothing more than a sham.

I suggest that we must still question whether it is really desirable to tamper with the Crow during a time of recession. The concept of a subsidy has been referred to by the Leader of the New Democratic Party and other Members participating in this debate, including my colleague the Hon. Member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski). It has not been fully explored by the Government.

In Argentina, as has been pointed out, the National Grain Board provides free rail transport for grain, from shipping stations to the ports. In Australia farmers pay less than 50 per cent of the cost of transporting grain. One example that the Leader of the New Democratic Party failed to mention is that in the European Economic Community there is a minimum direct subsidy of \$2.53 per bushel.

The United States subsidizes wheat producers at the rate of \$13.81 per tonne. In addition, there are a number of ways in which the Americans subsidize the transportation of grain. The United States army engineers maintain the canal system which is used for grain export transportation. There are a number of hidden methods by which the subsidy is given to the grain farmer in the United States.

At the very time when subsidies seem to be the order of the day with all our major competitors, we in Canada are doing exactly the opposite. We are saying to the farmer that he has