

Western Grain Transportation Act

grain producers. On February 1, 1983, after much discussion the Minister of Transport introduced his plan in Winnipeg. Now we see it reflected in Bill C-155. Between the time of the public announcement on February 1 and the time the legislation actually came into the House, there was clearly no consensus within western Canada on this Bill.

The Minister of Transport promised three additional changes to the initial February 1 announcement. First he promised that payments would go directly to the railways; second, that the cost of transportation would be linked to grain prices; and third, that there would be an increased number of commodities under the new statutory rate. I believe it was a very devious and Machiavellian plot by the Minister of Transport.

The promises were made but when the legislation came before the House they were not all reflected in Bill C-155. It is true that within the piece of legislation the payments directly to the railways were included. There was some increase in the commodities under the statutory rate or what the Minister of Transport is proposing as the new statutory rate, but there are other commodities which will never make it. I will explain that in a few moments. The linking of the cost of transportation to the price of grain was not included.

The Minister will tell us that these promises will be brought in in amendments at committee stage. If the Government plans on pushing through the legislation as fast as it has already indicated in the House and if those changes are made in the latter stages of the Bill, the promises will never appear in the final version of the Bill. This will be blamed on someone other than the Minister of Transport who made the promises. I do not think they will ever see the light of day because the Liberal Government will bring in closure in committee and stop the process just as it wishes to do on second reading. Those promises have some very big holes in them, and I think the Minister knew that when he made them.

The NDP made a proposal to the Government, but we have not received a response to it. As I mentioned, Bill C-155 is a very complex piece of legislation. We asked that instead of its being an omnibus Bill as it is now, the Minister of Transport look closely at our proposal to break it into three separate areas. First, the upgrading of our transportation system is very important and we want to see that done, but it should be taken out of this legislation and presented in a separate Bill. The second area that should be taken out of this Bill is the leasing and dealing with the very rich coal lands in British Columbia, Alberta and other parts of western Canada. We should no longer be giving guaranteed annual incomes or such prosperous gifts to the railway companies. Third, we want the statutory rates split from this Bill.

• (1140)

Those are three very distinctive and separate areas of the debate which obviously go in different directions. We want an upgraded transportation system. In Meadow Lake in my riding there used to be a million-bushel storage for grain in the elevators. The hopper cars that have been purchased can go

into Meadow Lake but cannot haul the grain out because the rails are in such bad shape that they cannot handle fully-loaded hopper cars on that branch line. Of course, we want an upgraded transportation system. The gifts from the coal fields to the CNR and CPR must stop. We want the freight rates maintained.

The Minister of Transport has heard that loud and clear. We in the NDP believe we should stop giving a guaranteed annual income to the railways. The railways should be paid for their actual losses for hauling grain. Payment should be made directly to them. When money is spent on upgrading our transportation system, or helping out the railways, there should be dollar-for-dollar equity for the taxpayers' money that is spent on the railway companies.

The message in western Canada has been loud and clear concerning the statutory Crow rate. We want the statutory Crow rate maintained because it is the only real subsidy, the only extra benefit for our grain producers. That is why it should be dealt with separately from the omnibus legislation before us. What the western Canadian farmers are saying has been heard many times by the Minister: "Keep the Crow, let Pepin go".

[Translation]

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, I am frankly astonished by the attitude of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) and his Cabinet colleagues, and although on the other side of the House they are insisting that closure is not being imposed at this time, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan), the most diplomatic Minister in this Government, indicated quite clearly that he would shortly be presenting a motion under Standing Order 82, which for all practical purposes would impose closure on a debate concerning transportation in Canada.

[English]

This is not simply the Crow rate as it applies in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan. It is something that is fundamental to a national transportation policy. The Atlantic Provinces will be severely affected by this Bill. Central Canada will be affected as well. The hardest hit will be the prairie Provinces. There are some rather stupid results coming out of this in so far as British Columbia and the shipment of grain to British Columbia is concerned. These proposals purportedly only affect the movement of grain for export and the many controls and costs involved. Therefore, high-quality grain being shipped into British Columbia will naturally be hit.

I am going to put on the record, if no one else has, what the Alberta Cattle Commission has said about this Bill. Possibly my colleague from Medicine Hat (Mr. Hargrave) has already referred to this. I will put it on the record in its entirety because it is an important reaction to the *volte face* by the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) and this administration, a *volte face* which the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) when meeting the western agricultural leaders less than a fortnight ago said was very much a change-about and a capitulation to