

Adjournment Debate

You can see my point, the statistics speak for themselves. Besides its accessibility to European markets, Churchill has definite locational advantages with regard to Arctic supply and also the supply of possible pipeline materials and distribution. Churchill has been called "The Gateway to the Central Arctic".

Then there is the railway that links Churchill with its southern neighbours. Most of the railway that runs from the Pas to Churchill has been upgraded during the past few years to the point where it is now capable of handling light aluminum hopper cars which exist for transporting grain. CNR officials have informed me that at present their facilities are capable of handling between 30 and 40 million bushels of grain without difficulties. I feel that the Wheat Board should be forced to make maximum use of this line, and I would go as far as to say the CPR should be allowed running rights by CNR.

At present the facilities at Churchill can handle 5 million bushels of storage. Although the port has the capability of handling upward of 40 million bushels in a shipping season, only about 22 million bushels are actually exported. If the facilities were upgraded and expanded it would not be an exaggeration to say that up to 14 million bushels of grain could be handled each month during the three month season.

There are many other pertinent reasons that come to mind when I think of why the port facilities should be upgraded. From the perspective of the prairie grain farmer a great deal of money could be saved if the bulk of his grain could be shipped through Churchill. There is also the point of reducing overhead costs. By shipping 40 million bushels—remember that is double the current quantity that is moved through the port—the overhead costs could reciprocally be reduced. There is also the question of simple economics that further strengthens my conviction that Churchill should and could be used to peak capacity.

The port is the only bright prospect for the community of Churchill. In fact the port is an important part of the economy of the entire north. The federal government has invested a lot of money in Churchill to revitalize the community. What is needed, though, is an economic base to support the existing facilities, and additional funds to upgrade these facilities further.

The advantages of shipping grain through Churchill are easy enough to comprehend. Why then has the federal government not accepted the fact that there are these advantages? The people of central Canada cannot seem to get the government to understand, although we have been trying for long enough, but we cannot get the government to realize that we have a sea port in central Canada that has not been utilized to its full capabilities.

● (2230)

The estimates for the past year indicated that \$12.5 million will be spent on the port of Churchill during the next four years. This amount will cover little more than maintenance. It is because of a lack of funds that port authorities cannot keep the port in operating condition. It is unfortunate that the government did not stick to its election promise.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner (London East)): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired.

Mr. Smith (Churchill): Could I not finish, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner (London East)): It has expired.

Mr. McKinley: One minute only.

Mr. Smith (Churchill): Thank you. Now that I have touched upon the reasons why the port of Churchill could become a more highly utilized terminal in terms of its capacity for grain movement, I feel I should make a few suggestions as to how the port could reach that state. At the port of Churchill the arrival and departure of ships should be better co-ordinated. At the present time the government does not see fit to co-ordinate the arrival of ships at the proper time. I feel that perhaps the government should be offering an incentive for grain handling ships to come into the port of Churchill, thus speeding up the movement of grain out of that port.

In closing I should like to say that I, for one, am convinced that Churchill could move double the amount of grain which is currently handled. For example, the shipping season this year opened July 23, but the first grain ship did not arrive in the port until August 18. The harbour board was still able to ship 22 million bushels of grain from August 18 to October 18. This proves beyond any doubt that Churchill could easily handle 40 million bushels of grain.

Henry Hudson discovered the bay which was named after him in 1610, and the site of Churchill was inhabited some 19 years later. One wonders—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner (London East)): Order, please. The hon. member's time has expired.

Mr. Smith (Churchill): I just have two words, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner (London East)): I am sorry.

Mr. Ralph E. Goodale (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I must say that I very much enjoyed the contribution of my hon. friend this evening with respect to the port of Churchill. I, and many others on this side of the House, have had the opportunity of hearing him speak on this subject on previous occasions in the House, and I can assure him that his representations do not go unnoticed.

As the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) informed the House on December 12, it is always the object of the Canadian Wheat Board to ship as much grain as possible through Churchill. In the 1975 shipping season, as my hon. friend just mentioned, 22,710,000 bushels of grain, all of which was barley, was shipped from Churchill. Unfortunately, in both of the last two years shipments from Churchill have begun rather late in what is a short season. In 1974 the first vessel did not arrive until August 11, and this year it was August 15.