

Western Grain Transportation Act

I hope, Sir, that we have the support of Hon. Members on all sides of the House. I think the Government itself must be questioning this nonsense of one Crown agency being able to levy a sanction or award on another. It simply is not practical, it will not work and can do nothing but cause more harm to the system of the handling, storage and transportation of grain.

I hope that these amendments will be supported, Mr. Speaker. I am asking for their support because of what occurred in the Transport Committee. I am confident that the amendments make sense, are practical and retain the powers and authorities of the Canadian Wheat Board, the mandate of which is to operate on behalf of the grain producers and no one else.

Mr. Terry Sargeant (Selkirk-Interlake): Mr. Speaker, the intent of Motions Nos. 36, 37 and 38 is to limit the authority of the Grain Transportation Administrator over the Canadian Wheat Board and the Canadian Grain Commission. I really do not see how Members of the House could have any problem with that.

We all know, and it has been documented time and time again, that the problem with our grain delivery system when it does break down is not with the Wheat Board or the Grain Commission. The problem is with the railway companies. It is the railway companies that leave grain cars sitting for as long as 90 days at country elevators when the grain in those cars is needed for export sales. It is the representatives of the railway companies who tell the agent of a country elevator that they will pick up a car on Monday, making it necessary for the agent to work through the weekend filling that car, when in the end the car is left sitting for another two or three days.

The problem with our grain delivery system, Mr. Speaker, is not that producers cannot get the grain to the elevator in time to be marshalled for export. It is not that when the grain gets to the terminals in Prince Rupert, Thunder Bay, Vancouver or Churchill that it is needlessly held up. The problem is and has been for some time now that the railways cannot seem to meet their obligations to move grain from the elevators to port quickly and efficiently. The railways have been responsible for leaving millions of dollars worth of grain sitting in rail cars on sidings by country elevators when it should be at the terminals being loaded on to ships for export.

The first of this group of amendments, Mr. Speaker, is Motion No. 36. What does it do? This motion restricts the authority of the Grain Transportation Administrator to apply sanctions for failing to meet performance objectives only to the railways. It also removes the authority of the Administrator to grant awards to the railways for meeting their performance objectives. Motion No. 36 is the broadest of the three in this group and it is the one that I think the House should accept, Mr. Speaker. Since Motions Nos. 37 and 38 are consequential to Motion No. 36, I will focus my attention on Motion No. 36.

First, why do we want to restrict the authority of the Administrator to apply sanctions only to the railway companies? Would it not be valuable to have those sanctions applied

to the Wheat Board and to the Grain Commission as well? I think it is pretty evident that those sanctions should not apply to the Wheat Board and to the Grain Commission. I have already mentioned the documented fact that it is the railways that have been, and continue to be, the problem in the grain delivery system. It is the railways that leave grain cars sitting on the sidings by country elevators when those cars, as I have said, are needed in Thunder Bay, Churchill or one of the other terminals.

That is not the only reason for applying sanctions only to the railways. As my diligent colleague, the Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin), tried to explain time and again in committee, the Canadian Grain Commission is itself responsible for regulating the quality of grain and the allocation of grain cars. It is already responsible to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan). The Canadian Wheat Board is responsible for marshalling grain and selling it for export and is already responsible to the Wheat Board Minister. It seems to me that either of these agencies ball up the delivery of grain to port. Their respective Ministers already have the authority to do what has to be done to straighten the problem out. What is the need of another regulatory agency overseeing these regulatory agencies?

• (1150)

Without this amendment, Mr. Speaker, we will find ourselves in the ludicrous situation of having a system of awards and sanctions established by one regulatory agency, the Grain Transportation Administrator, to regulate another regulatory agency, the Canadian Wheat Board, itself responsible for regulating other system participants such as the elevator companies and the terminal elevators. We will have a situation where one regulatory agent, the Grain Transportation Administrator, is regulating another regulatory agency, the Canadian Grain Commission, itself responsible for regulating producer cars, grades and type and quality of grains. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we would have regulatory agencies or top of regulatory agencies.

The Liberals and the Tories, who have accepted this scheme in committee, have already given new meaning to bureaucratic overkill, and that is not all. There is a very real danger that in accepting this Tory and Liberal scheme of regulatory agencies regulating regulatory agencies, we could be doing a great deal of harm to farmers. If the Administrator of the Grain Transportation Committee is left with the ability to tamper with the allocation of rail cars or interfere with the quota system as part of the system of notional sanctions, it will be the farmers who will pay. If the Grain Commission is prevented by the Administrator from allocating producer cars, it will be grain producers who are left holding the bag. If the quota system is tampered with, it will not be the Wheat Board which suffers, it will not be the elevator companies which suffer, it will be the farmers who suffer.

When the Transport Committee was dealing with this Bill, the Deputy Minister of Transport tried to explain why he wanted the Administrator to have the power to impose sanc-