

Department of Transport Act

they are forced to do so. For this reason, Mr. Chairman, I should like to submit that perhaps the Canadian Pacific officials should be brought to task and perhaps called upon to try to offer the same service to the western grain producers that our own Canadian National Railway offers. As I have pointed out, we were very happy to see this resolution introduced, and we will reserve any further comments we may have in this regard until the bill is introduced.

Mr. Dinsdale: Mr. Chairman, I want to take this opportunity to express support of the resolution we have before the house. On the surface it appears to be a routine resolution. The Minister of Transport is asking for the continuation for a further period of two years of the authority to make regulations for the control of the transportation of goods in bulk, including amongst other things the appointment of one controller or more to look after this function.

This measure, I believe, was first passed in 1954. Prior to that, as I recall, there was considerable agitation in this house that steps be taken whereby the problem of dealing with the transportation of goods in bulk, primarily grain, could be taken care of in a more efficient manner. I recall, for example, when I first came to this house in 1951 the former member for the old Souris constituency, Mr. Arthur Ross, was active in making suggestions of this kind. As a result of similar representations, the measure was finally passed in 1954. Actually at that time it was merely regularizing procedures that had been carried out under order in council. I firmly believe that having the measure spelled out in concrete legislative terms is a much better way of dealing with the matter than the haphazard order in council procedure.

When the measure was originally passed, we were confronted with pressure on our transportation systems from bulk goods other than wheat. It seems to me that in more recent years, judging from the discussions in this house as well as from comments arising across the country, the major difficulty in making provision for the efficient and effective transport of bulk goods arises from the continuing problem of grain congestion on the prairies. Certainly, this was true of the situation that arose last fall. There is no necessity for me to emphasize this particular problem. It has already been covered quite thoroughly by the speakers before me in this discussion today. In supporting the reappointment of the transport controller, I should like to raise the query as to whether there is a real shortage of box cars in Canada. Perhaps

[Mr. Smith (Battle River-Camrose).]

when the minister replies to the various representations that have been made he will clarify this question.

Are we confronted with an absolute shortage of box cars in Canada? There has been conflicting information given in reference to this particular question. I recall the former minister of transport, Mr. Chevrier, insisting that there was no real shortage of box cars, but that it was just a matter of having them in the right place at the right time. Reading the evidence before the committee on railways that met earlier this year, I discovered that the president of the Canadian National is also of the opinion that there is no absolute shortage of box cars in Canada. Speaking directly to the question, for example, of the delivery of our huge grain crops, Mr. Gordon said that during the current crop year at no time has the Canadian National failed to take up the capacity made available to it at the terminal elevators in the west. Someone has laid down the figures that in order to handle the grain crop at the peak period of the year it is necessary to have 50,000 cars available in the west. This is a fairly substantial number of cars, and I just wonder whether our railways, both the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific, are in a position to meet that demand when it occurs from year to year. Looking at the actual situation that occurred last fall, there is some evidence which suggests that there is a real shortage of box cars. For instance, as has been pointed out before, at the close of the navigation season on the great lakes there was space available in the grain elevators across the country for some 100 million bushels. This immediately raises the query why, if we had sufficient box cars to handle the movement of grain, was this space available? Then again, from August to the close of the navigation season there were 35,000 fewer grain cars loaded than had been loaded in 1954.

During the discussion a few weeks ago of the problem of grain marketing the Minister of Trade and Commerce suggested that the problem that occurred in the west last fall was largely the result of the shortage of box cars that prevailed in western Canada. Now, the query I raise, and I trust the Minister of Transport will be able to help us in this regard, is: is it a real shortage or was it a temporary shortage? Do we have enough box cars in Canada to meet all the demands of the movement of bulk goods and particularly the movement of the very large grain crop that has been produced on the prairies in recent years?

If there is not a real shortage of box cars, it would seem to me that the problem must be one of allocation. We have had many