

Western Grain Transportation Act

without fault. The Board does not deny that there was some problem with the purchase, but it did it out of necessity.

One amendment would take powers away from the Minister and then transfer them back to the Canadian Wheat Board and the other deals with the control of cars that are already owned by the Government.

I hope that the NDP will debate these motions quickly. They must have motions that they feel are more important than these. I think we should be able to do something to enhance the Bill. The Minister is here, he is interested in the debate and we should be able to persuade the Government to take a closer look at amendments put forward this afternoon.

Mrs. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on these amendments although I confess I am not an expert on the Crowsnest Pass freight rates. The Bill has been a tremendous education to us all and we see what it means to be a Canadian. At first I think many of us felt that the Bill had particular significance only to farmers on the Prairies and to the whole agricultural economy there.

As critic for this Party on the status of women, last night I spoke to farm women and I was interested to hear their concerns about the Bill. Often farm women maintain a home, work on the farm in partnership with the family and are forced to go to work in the community in order to bring in more money. The increase in the freight rates will make it even more difficult for them and their families to manage.

These amendments have a particular significance for British Columbians, particularly for the Port of Vancouver.

Motions No. 55 and No. 56 are concerned with the role of railway cars. I do not think the Minister has made it clear why the Liberals want to change the authority for control and distribution of the railway cars. I am not aware of any reason for concentrating power in the Minister or why the Canadian Wheat Board would not have control. I can only conclude that, as usual, the Liberals are more interested in centralized bureaucratic control than in having it closer to the producers. One wonders whether they want to give more control over to the railways as well.

One could ask whether there is a dispute between the Minister in the other place and the Minister of Transport (Mr. Axworthy) in the House. Whatever the motivation, the Minister offered no explanation.

The NDP has a very clear and distinct reason for disagreeing with Motion No. 55 and for proposing Motion No. 56. We want the Canadian Wheat Board to be more powerful, and to be able to coordinate the transportation of grain through the system to the point of export, which in my riding is the Port of Vancouver. This means that they must be able to call out whichever type of grain is needed at a particular time, whether it be wheat, barley, oats, etc.

Regarding Motion No. 55, it simply says that the grain cars to which the Canadian Wheat Board now has title should be transferred in title to the Minister of Transport at his pleasure. These cars were purchased from the pool account maintained

by the Wheat Board. That means they were purchased from the farmers' money. The amount of money distributed to farmers from the sale of their grain was reduced by the amount that it cost to buy these cars. To simply transfer the ownership of these cars to the Government without any recognition of this fact or the payment of any compensation would be, at the very least, an injustice. It really constitutes a special tax by the state on farmers. All the hoary traditions of British democracy, such as it is, militate against that sort of thing.

It could be pointed out that the question of Government spending on grain cars was itself a controversial issue and spending by the Wheat Board for this purpose even more so. The argument, at the time, was why should others assume the burden of this capital cost that properly belongs to the railroad. However, the producers, knowing the job had to be done and faced with the intransigence of the railroads, made the investment. This, of course, was good for the country. Should they now be penalized for that? Should they be double-taxed? I believe that view was presented in committee.

I should like now to refer to a letter issued by a very famous statesman, the Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin).

An Hon. Member: What?

Mrs. Mitchell: He appears to be an expert on this whole question. This Member has a valuable ability to produce a constant flow of information. I wish Members to my right could get on his mailing list.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: I already subscribe to the *National Enquirer* and all the joke books.

Mrs. Mitchell: In a letter to constituents he wrote:

Greetings: I just reviewed some of the earlier letters that I sent to you, and I see that this October 4th I promised to explain, "next letter," the reason why it is so important to maintain the Wheat Board's control over the allocation of grain cars. The pressure of events here caused it to slip my mind.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: That was my reaction.

● (2330)

Mrs. Mitchell: Remembering the pressure of the event on that particular day I cannot help but smile a little, Mr. Speaker. I will continue:

—it is very important that the Wheat Board retain control of the allocation of grain cars. As Justice Hall pointed out, the concentration of knowledge in the offices of the Wheat Board makes for a very efficient system of moving our grain to export position.

This Bill would tamper with that and would do our country no good.

So said the Hon. Member for Regina West. As I understand this whole issue, Mr. Speaker, having the control of grain cars under the authority of the Wheat Board—and we are talking about control, not ownership—would make for a much more efficient system of moving grain to export as it is needed than we have had in the past. In the port of Vancouver, for example, one of the big concerns which we constantly have is that we look out at the English Bay and we see 10, sometimes 20 ships sitting there, moored in the outer harbour, from all