

Western Grain Transportation Act

in different directions carrying grain north and south so they can eventually go west. It is a ridiculous situation. It is one that we as Members of Parliament cannot ignore. Not only does grain go north and south but it hits a bottleneck in Calgary. I know because I have worked for the railways for 35 years. When the grain hits Calgary there are switching cars at the Keith yard. This switching goes on for as long as five hours. I would surmise that the same thing happens at Edmonton.

We in the House have allowed taxpayers' money to go forward to build extra grain cars. I say it is a waste of money because grain cars are being held up for hours at a time. Not only are cars being held up in Calgary but then we have problems at places like Rogers. Cars sit in the siding waiting. The train goes on westward again until it reaches Chase and then Monte Creek. The cars sit on sidings for weeks on end while the railway decides when it is time to start moving farther west. A train is 300 miles away from port and it will leave from Revelstoke and be told to set off 50 cars of grain at Chase. Then it will be told to continue on and set another 35 cars off at Monte Creek and continue to Kamloops.

Then we get into a situation where we have another train of grain. This train will be asked to pick up 25 cars at Chase. In order to do that, the train will pull out 100 cars of grain, put on 25 and shove the rest back, and continue on. What a ridiculous situation.

The Hon. Member for Vegreville is right on with his amendment. It is time these railways had someone to administer what is going on. There are computer systems. I know for a fact that in Revelstoke you can ask where a CP car number such and such is. That information can be had with a touch of a button. When there is that kind of system in place, we can certainly have one of the most up to date transportation systems of handling grain anywhere. I want to say that we can feel proud of the Wheat Board because of the way it serves the needs of the producers.

Not only could we have an efficient way of handling grain but we could also apply the system to the handling of other commodities. We do not see unit cars of coal sitting in a siding unless there is some emergency or breakdown, and that is understandable. But unit cars of coal coming out of the Kootenays make their turn and come back in an efficient manner. This could be done with grain and other commodities.

I think it is wrong when we bring in legislation which makes those kinds of guarantees of money to the railways without having the railways guarantee that they will live up to the kind of performance that we expect.

I think we can utilize those grain cars which the Government has provided and which the Wheat Board has put forward in a much more efficient manner. They can go across the country faster. Instead of having grain cars sitting in sidings, they can be unloaded and returned or they could at least be brought a little closer to the destination in cases such as that.

If we can shoot rockets to the sky and pinpoint where they land, surely we can co-ordinate some grain from our shipping areas in the Prairies to our ports in Vancouver that will make connections with boats and ships. I think it is a disgrace that we should be discussing this situation today. This sort of thing should have been put in place a long time ago. One billion dollars a year is a lot of money to guarantee to these railways without any major guarantees made to this House of Commons. I think every Member on the Liberal side of the House should reconsider what has been put in this Bill and get assurances that the railway will do the upgrading.

If Liberal Members would like to ask questions afterwards, I will be prepared to answer them. I can hear some of them shouting from across the way.

● (1730)

There is no question about it. We should have an Administrator who is capable of looking at situations as they arise and seeing where it will be beneficial to trade off with CP and CN on certain grain commodities at certain times. Certain types of grain which are being handled at the present time by CN could meet the requirements when the grain being carried by CP does not meet the requirements. We could co-ordinate different types of grain and ensure that they travel on different railways. I disagree with what the Hon. Member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor) said when he expressed the idea of railways running loaded one way and empty the other. It is not feasible to run loaded trains on one track in one direction and empty in the other, because it will throw out track alignments. Loads must go back and forth to keep trackbeds aligned. It is not like a highway, and it is not feasible in the operations of railways.

I urge Government Members to consider what they are doing, to adopt the amendment and to ensure that we have some mechanism whereby we are guaranteed that the railways will carry out what we expect of them.

Mr. Benno Friesen (Surrey-White Rock-North Delta): Mr. Speaker, I know the Government would like the debate to end, particularly on this particular clause, because it is not interested in putting some muscle into the legislation to make the railway corporations do what they ought to do, that is, give some assurance to producers that the money flowing to them by means of this legislation will in fact be spent to the advantage of grain producers.

The amendment is very simple. It asks that the Government give a statutory declaration that railways shall be required to maximize the returns to producers. It is "shall be"; not may be, not happenstance, not hope so, not even ought to. The Hon. Member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski) makes his request for a very good reason. Producers have had much experience at being disappointed by railways. Is it good enough to extend \$651 million to the corporation and hope that it will be spent for the benefit of producers? Is it good enough to expect that, especially when we look at the long lists of interventions by railways relative to branch line abandonment? Are the railways thinking first of producers when they make application to