

Canadian Wheat Board Act

● (1020)

I would like to read a most urgent and telling communication which members of the Standing Committee on Agriculture have received, signed by Bill Strath, the President of the Manitoba Pool Elevators, who acts as the person responsible for Prairie Pools Inc. As well, it is signed by Garth Stevenson, the President of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, and by Mr. D. E. Livingstone, the President of the Alberta Wheat Pool. This came from an urgent message on July 8, the day that we dealt with report stage and concurrence. It was addressed to all Members of Parliament, and it said:

The Board of Directors of Prairie Pools Inc., meeting in Calgary today, reiterates its strong opposition to inclusion of Clause 8 of Bill C-92, amending the Canadian Wheat Board Act.

Prairie Pools Inc. is a western based farm organization with a membership of 130,000 farmers in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Clause 8 would allow the Canadian Wheat Board to waive interest and storage charges on grain shipped in producer cars.

The farmers' right to use a producer car must be maintained. However, the only savings that should be deducted are elevation and handling costs. Any further deduction of storage will likely add to the costs of those farmers using the country elevator system. The infrastructure costs of western Canada's grain handling system are not charged to the users of producer cars.

That is the point I have been making here this morning. The whole section of the infrastructure relating to the country delivery points is not covered in this Bill and cannot be covered because the Bill does not provide amendments to the Western Grain Transportation Act. The letter continues:

There is clear evidence of extra costs associated with the producer car since these costs are attributed to the railways and are paid for by all producers in the costing process.

You are aware of direct expressions of concern from large numbers of grain producers in the Prairie area. We urge you to take all possible steps to remove Clause 8 from Bill C-92.

That is the nub of the problem. They are not arguing about elevating charges; they are arguing about the storage and interest of carrying charges.

I think that this issue was really brought forward by the Prairie Pools Inc. It is opposed strongly by them because they see a number of straws in the wind against the whole idea of the Canadian Wheat Board. They know that its powers and prerogatives will be reduced by the Canada-U.S. trade deal, that there will be provision for grain to come in from the United States, and they will not be issuing end-use certificates. They know that feed grain will come in and be denatured, which will cost an extra \$7 or \$8 a tonne, I am told, and that that grain in the end can be used illegally for planting. Many producers in western Canada see the powers and prerogatives of the Wheat Board and the whole system of marketing run down by the Mulroney-Reagan trade deal. They see the whole country elevator system being destroyed or weakened by this, because the producers using producer cars will not be paying for their fair share of the infrastructure for country-delivered points.

I think that these matters should be taken into consideration by the Government. It did not come forward with a Bill with the whole range of western grain transportation aspects of it. It did not come clean with the exact information. If it had come forward with the data, proving that the storage and interest charges and carrying charges were much higher than the infrastructure cost of maintaining those country delivery points, I think that it would have had a much more telling argument before the committee and before the House, but it did not bother.

Those are the issues which are still with us in this Bill and on which the Government is really missing the point. I hope that when this matter is before the other place it will get more thorough study because, although there was some concern when it went through the agriculture committee several months ago, the intensity of the concern in the prairie regions is much stronger now. At that time we asked for information from the two railway companies. I believe we asked for information as well from the National Transportation Agency as to the exact costs, so that when dealing with this at report stage we would be able to compare. We do not have that information. The situation is no better now than it was at report stage when the Hon. Member for Prince Albert (Mr. Hovdebo) and I put forward amendments to Bill C-92.

I hope that more information can be garnered, if not here at least in the Senate, so that they can deal with this in an effective way. Clearly, there is a lot of concern in the prairie region with this legislation, partly because of the other overriding concerns with the trade deal, and also that the Government has not come clean and has not provided the information. The railway companies have not provided the information. We have a situation where we do not know how much the Government is going to be giving back, whether there will be a tremendous incentive for the people who use producer cars. If we see that, then we know that the Government will be hell-bent on destroying the whole pooling system and the Canadian Wheat Board. There are certainly a lot of straws in the wind in that regard already. These are the concerns as we move to third reading of Bill C-92.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Mr. Speaker, I have to rise again on the whole matter of orderly marketing, particularly the Canadian Wheat Board. This is probably the tenth or twelfth occasion in the last 20 years when there has been a further erosion and the whittling away at the whole principle of orderly marketing, single-desk selling, for all western grain producers through the Canadian Wheat Board and the marketing system which it entails.

The whole purpose and reason for the existence of that system of grain handling and marketing in Canada is to allow the grain producers to co-operatively pool, share the cost of moving the grain and share the benefits from that system. That has worked very well in practice as well as in principle since 1935, particularly since the start of the Second World