

Canadian National Railways and Air Canada

could stop to get water. That day has gone, but the lines still go around the lakes. Mr. Speaker, I believe the government ought to spend about \$5 billion straightening out the lines to make the service faster and more convenient.

● (2040)

These days we hear a great deal about the gasoline shortage and the fuel shortage. We hear the Minister of State for Urban Affairs (Mr. Basford) saying that cities must not be allowed to sprawl the way they are at the moment. The railway lines are already there, and it seems to me we ought to be converting people to the use of public transportation. I am firmly convinced that the CNR does everything in its power to discourage passengers from using its service. It has taken a leaf out of the book of CPR in that respect, and I disagree with it. We should be trying to get the CNR to establish an improved passenger service.

During the last election campaign an announcement was made about the removal of railway lines from downtown cores. The CN quickly moved their lines from downtown Sudbury to the suburbs. But the CPR lines are still there. CN built what I call a little passenger hut, Mr. Speaker, because that is what it is. Every time we get a fog that closes the airport, a crowd of people go over to get the train and find they have to stand out in the rain. That little waiting-room is not any more than two feet by two feet, and I am not exaggerating. The area has a population of close to 180,000, so the waiting-room is not adequate. People become disgusted when they cannot even find shelter from the elements. The town of Capreol is on the transcontinental line, and there we find a building that must be at least 100 years old. It must have been there at the time of confederation, Mr. Speaker, and apparently has some historical significance because it is crumbling away. However, no effort is made to provide for passengers' comfort.

If we do get on the train, we find that the price of meals is exorbitant. I think inflation hit the railways ten years before it hit the rest of Canada, and I strongly suspect that they use the profits of the dining-car to pay for the private cars that they have all over the country for the personal use of the regional managers. Liver and onions costs \$2.45, hamburger costs \$1.50, coffee 25 cents, and Coke 30 cents a bottle. This sort of thing discourages people. If you want a sleeping berth, you are told that none is available. This happened to me, and then I went to the Ottawa station and asked for a berth to Vancouver and was told that one was available. There seems to be no system of reservations at all for the public convenience.

If the energy crisis continues, then a public transit system for this country will become increasingly important. But the government seems to think they have things under control. When we ask the minister a question about the possibility of cutting freight rates, we are told that this would have to be done by the Canadian Transport Commission. Mr. Speaker, who runs the country? Surely not some commissioners sitting around in opulent rooms. Surely it is the government elected by the people of the country. I believe the proceedings of the House of Commons should be televised so that Canadians could see what happens when important questions are asked. Matters touching on the lives of the half million people in northern Ontario are brushed aside and we are told that a

[Mr. Rodriguez.]

commission has to make the decisions. Why do we need a government, if a commission can decide? I cannot speak too harshly about that kind of thing.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that it is apparently all right for CNR to subsidize commuters between Detroit and Pontiac, Michigan, to the tune of \$375,000 annually. We have been doing that since 1954. If we can do that, then what about the people who live in northern Ontario? Perhaps we should subsidize their food-stuffs. If the government of the province of Ontario can equalize the price of beer between southern Ontario and northern Ontario, surely the federal government can do something to ameliorate freight rates in northern Ontario so that the region does not have to develop only as a resource economy. An adequate rail service would be the first step toward developing secondary industry in a area such as mine. Millions of dollars are spent on the educational system there, but when the young people reach working age they find they must leave because there is very little opportunity for those aged 18 to 25.

How can urban sprawl be stopped when the people of northern Ontario have no secondary industries, no interesting jobs in research and development to offer the young people who find they have to go to the large urban centres where the opportunities are greater? I wish the people of Canada could be transported into this House to see what goes on.

I urge the Minister of Transport to use the power of his office to make sure that Canadian National Railways, which is owned by the people of Canada, is used for the benefit of Canada. Some great things could be done. This railway system links the two ends of the country. Surely we could improve the system to the point where people would prefer to go by rail rather than drive on crowded highways on which they may be prone to accidents and the hazards of inclement weather in areas such as the one I represent. Can we not improve the service to the point where people will want to use the railway? I urge the minister to use his power in that way as an elected officer of this country.

● (2050)

Secondly, I am concerned about freight rates. They are most important, Mr. Speaker. The Ontario government has cut freight rates on the ONR by 18 per cent. Why cannot the CNR do the same? The CNR ought to cut freight rates in that area if we are to move out of that second-class slot in northern Ontario in which we merely take stuff out of the ground, ship it out and then take back the finished product. Surely we can expect the Liberal government to act in this regard. Liberal members have represented northern Ontario for the last 50 years. Formerly, 9 out of 12 members representing the area were Liberal. Just before I came along, 11 out of 12 were Liberal. Surely those Liberal members know that freight rates are at the root of our problem in northern Ontario. Surely those members who represent northern Ontario have the ear of the minister. Indeed, I think they also have his tail, but that is beside the point. The fact is that they ought to do something worthwhile for northern Ontario. They have the power, as they represent the area. The members of my party would be quite willing to support Liberal members