

he may understand the argument I am trying to make in a reasonable way.

The resolution was presented after an examination of the estimates and after questions put to the chairman of the commission as to why it felt obliged to make the decision in the first instance to allow Canadian National Railways to abandon rail passenger service in the province of Newfoundland and replace it with a bus service. This decision was made by the commission shortly after the June 25 election; I believe it was brought down on June 27. I leave it to hon. members to suggest the import of that date.

The whole question of the withdrawal by the C.N.R. from passenger service in Newfoundland was a matter of great concern during the election campaign. The maintaining of the service became a policy of our party. Every Conservative candidate who ran in Newfoundland had as the main plank in his platform the maintenance and upgrading of rail passenger service in Newfoundland. Consequently those of us from Newfoundland who sit on this side of the house felt then, as we do now, that we had a mandate from the people of Newfoundland to do everything possible to have this unjust decision set aside.

It was in carrying out this mandate that we availed ourselves of the first opportunity presented to us to object to the withdrawal. This first opportunity was presented during the examination of the estimates of the Canadian Transport Commission. It was with this in mind that we moved the resolution in the committee.

Hon. members will recall that preceding the reference to the committee we availed ourselves of another opportunity presented to us to debate this matter in the house. This took place during our consideration of the annual C.N. financing bill. It was at that time that the government house leader gave the undertaking that we would have an opportunity to discuss this matter in the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications and to question the president of the Canadian Transport Commission. He also undertook to provide an opportunity for us to examine the officials of Canadian National Railways when he referred the annual report of the C.N.R. to that committee.

I point these facts out in order to indicate to the house, and to the hon. member who feels obliged to defend his honour in this regard because, as he has said, he feels charges were made against him in a shameful and irresponsible way, that this is a very

serious matter. We feel we are discharging our responsibilities as members of parliament for Newfoundland.

An hon. Member: Irresponsibilities.

Mr. McGrath: We feel we are discharging the solemn undertaking we gave to the people of Newfoundland during the last federal election campaign. There is nothing partisan about this. We are just fulfilling a solemn undertaking which we made, and we are continuing to do so. That is why we examined very exhaustively and intensively the estimates of the commission as well as the president and his officials. We were trying to determine what prompted this decision and why the commission felt obliged to go against the recommendations of the people of Newfoundland.

The government of Newfoundland opposed this decision in a brief presented to the commission. The Newfoundland Liberal members of this house during the last parliament opposed the decision in a brief they presented. The hon. member for Burin-Burgeo (Mr. Jamieson) can substantiate that. Those hon. members presented a brief to the commission in complete opposition to the instant withdrawal of this service. I think their recommendation was that the phase-out, if there was to be a phase-out, of the rail passenger service should take place over a period of at least five years; in other words, operate the bus system in the province concurrently with the rail system for five years and at the end of that time review the whole picture. That was a reasonable request.

● (1:20 p.m.)

I do not know why the Canadian Transport Commission felt obliged to go against popular opinion, to go against the members of parliament from Newfoundland, to go against the Newfoundland legislature, to go against the Newfoundland government, to go against the Newfoundland railway unions, to go against organized labour in Newfoundland. I believe we were entitled to have an answer to this question. It was for this reason particularly that we conducted the examination that took place in the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications which culminated in the moving of the resolution which was adopted by the committee on November 28 and was the substance of my question of privilege to the house on December 10.

I think it is worth reading into the record the third report of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections which dealt with