

Canadian National Railways

by the people of Newfoundland. I should like to quote the words of the acting chairman of the commission and these are his words, not mine:

We as the youngest province in the confederation are entitled to treatment equal to that given the other provinces.

Second class citizens we will continue to be, Mr. Chairman, if we settle for less than equal treatment. As I said at the outset, Mr. Chairman, if we permit Canadian National Railways to embark piecemeal upon a program of abandoning their rail passenger services, and thereby the responsibilities of the government under the terms of union to provide such service to Newfoundland, then we are allowing ourselves to be treated as second class citizens. I repeat that I hope I will have the chance to direct questions to the officials of the Canadian National. After all, perhaps this is the beginning of a five year program, even a ten year program, to abandon rail passenger services all across Canada. I say to the committee that until it becomes the general policy of the government to permit Canadian National Railways to abandon passenger services all across the country we in Newfoundland will not—I repeat—will not permit ourselves to be used as second class citizens in this matter or in any other matter before this house.

• (4:40 p.m.)

Before resuming my seat I ask the President of the Treasury Board to give hon. members of this committee who are vitally interested in the subject an undertaking that when the estimates of the railway are being considered we shall have a chance to examine officials of the Canadian National with respect to this matter and other matters which vitally interest us. The absence of the Minister of Transport, the Minister without Portfolio who is responsible for the Minister of Transport, and the Minister of Defence Production, from Newfoundland, have been noted. Under the circumstances I do not think it unreasonable to ask for this undertaking.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Perhaps I might say a word on this matter, Mr. Chairman. There has been quite a bit of talk this afternoon about the Canadian Transport Commission. I point out to the hon. gentleman that the estimates of that particular board have already been referred to the transport committee. The estimates of the Department of Transport were not referred, at the request of the opposition, and are still before the house.

I will give an undertaking on behalf of the Minister of Transport that, by way of reference of the estimates of the forthcoming financial year or by way of reference of the financial report of the Canadian National, the hon. gentleman will have an opportunity to consider these questions in the committee, and an opportunity to examine senior officials of the railway.

Mr. Harding: Mr. Chairman, the topic I shall stick to closely has to do with the erosion of passenger service in British Columbia. I listened with interest to hon. members from Newfoundland and the Atlantic provinces who complained about the erosion of transport facilities in their provinces. Our problems seem common. The problems of British Columbia to a greater or lesser extent are found in every province of this country.

I know the railways can always come before the Board of Transport Commissioners and present a pretty good case. I have engaged in several protests to the board and government over the abandonment of services, since it seems that over the years there has been a deliberate erosion of the service and the accommodation offered by various companies in this field of transport. This erosion is continuing.

It is simple for one of our national railways to make out a good case for the abandonment of a certain line. We saw that happen in the case of the Kettle Valley line in the Kootenay country. I will not spend much time on this.

Mr. McIntosh: We have already heard a great deal about the Kettle Valley Railway.

Mr. Harding: I'll bet you have. Passenger service has been eliminated because the company in question greatly reduced the services which the public could obtain. First the sleeping accommodation went. I ask, who wants to travel for a day and a half without some kind of sleeping accommodation? Then the dining car service was taken off. Then, at stopovers, passengers had to get off the train and go to a hotel.

What was the result? After one or two years of this sort of thing the company went to the Board of Transport Commissioners with a bleak revenue picture saying, "Look, we can't make any money on this line. This is what's happening." I submit such a policy has been deliberately followed, and is continuing.

I will now protest the quality of service we are obtaining on our trans-Canada lines. The worst offender is the Canadian Pacific. The