

carrying toxic gases and explosive materials in major urban centres where there are so many junctions and switches could be put into effect. The hon. member for Winnipeg-Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy) mentioned several weeks ago a situation in downtown Winnipeg. If I am not mistaken, an hon. member from the Vancouver area also expressed his concern in this regard for that major metropolitan centre.

Another possibility is reclassifying chlorine as a poisonous gas, and propane and butane as explosives. This could be done right now by the minister. What about the classification of PCBs? I could not even find them mentioned in the red book on regulations. One other item I mentioned a few minutes ago was the elimination of the requirement that a CTC inspector must spend five years as a railroad official before becoming an inspector. I am sure that the minister would agree with me that my colleague, the hon. member for London East (Mr. Turner), who has probably been over the last 11 years the most eloquent spokesman for rail safety in this country, would make an excellent CTC inspector, but under the present regulations he does not even qualify.

I would like to congratulate the minister on bringing this bill to the House at this particular time. I think that it is most opportune and should not be thought of as being cynical because of the Mississauga situation, because right now rail safety is in the minds of all Canadians. We, as parliamentarians, must take advantage of this opportunity and have a full discussion with not only the industry and the provinces, but with the public and many interested individuals such as the professor from Carleton University and the group Transport 2000, who have long voiced very strong concerns about rail safety in this country.

Several of my colleagues, such as the hon. member for London East, and the hon. member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray), who has spent two or three years discussing this particular issue in his municipality, would like to participate in this debate, but because of our interest, concern and wish to get this bill into committee, they have passed up this opportunity in the House. However, we will see them during the committee hearings.

● (2040)

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to add my approval of the fact that this bill has come before the House too soon. I begin my remarks on the bill by reminding the House that accidents involving dangerous goods are not a new occurrence. All of us have heard of, and I am sure some will remember, the explosion in Halifax harbour during a previous war. An entire city was devastated, hundreds of people were killed, and millions of dollars worth of property was destroyed, all because the urgency and uncertainty of the day prevented proper safeguards for the movement of hazardous substances.

The war is long over but cities across Canada are threatened by potential disasters involving toxic, corrosive, explosive, radioactive and combustible substances. The increased consumption of synthetic goods which are made from hazardous

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substances has increased the frequency and severity of transportation accidents involving dangerous goods. In 1977 alone, Canadian railways carried 1,295,062 tons of sulphuric acid, 89,807 tons of explosives, 46,891 tons of sodium hydroxide, and 47,419 tons of other types of inorganic chemicals.

Public policy has not kept pace with the increased volumes of hazardous goods being transported. Clearly, legislation is required. The government indicated, prior to the Mississauga derailment, that it intended to bring in legislation pertaining to the transportation of such goods. In fact I asked a question on October 12 of this year, and the answer to my question as to when the legislation would be coming forward was, "soon". I take it for granted that the intentions of the government with regard to bringing this legislation forward were genuine and I have no cynicism as to whether they would have brought in this legislation in the absence of the event at Mississauga.

Legislation several years ago may have prevented the catastrophe at Mississauga, and for the absence of such legislation we have the former Liberal government to blame. While the legislation proposed in Bill C-25 does not provide the details that would prevent future spills such as the one at Mississauga, regulations could and should, and we expect will, be published subsequent to the passage of this bill, that will prevent dangerous combinations of cars on the same train, and require proper identification and classification of substances.

With regard to the order today by the Canadian Transport Commission concerning a space of five cars between toxic and inflammable gases, there are many derailments in which trains pile up like an accordion. It is not inconceivable that we could still have a car loaded with toxic substances landing on top of a car filled with a flammable substance.

As we know, and as I said before, the Liberals introduced a dangerous goods bill some time ago. I would like to point out some of the ways in which this bill appears to be an improvement. For example, in this bill there seems to be fewer excuses for those who must pay for the costs borne by the taxpayers for emergency measures. The commitment to federal action in the absence of provincial agreement after a period of 12 months is an improvement. The fact that the minister may make orders respecting handling and transportation of dangerous goods pending the report of an inquiry appears to be an improvement.

There are other problems, however, which I will not go into at this time, except for one I feel obliged to mention. That is the deletion of protection of the environment, something the hon. member for Stormont-Dundas (Mr. Lumley) did not mention, as reason to take emergency measures, seize dangerous goods, or conduct an inquiry.

I find it worthy of some reflection that environment has been removed from the list of health, life and property in the previous bill. Environment is a form of common property and should have been left in the bill as a concern pertaining to the transportation of dangerous goods. However, I leave these and other detailed comments until the bill is before committee. We certainly have no problem with the bill being sent to commit-