

Canadian National Railways and Air Canada

Let me give an example. Many examples were brought forward this afternoon; however, let me tell you of one that strikes home, that shows that the government has ignored the wishes of parliament and of the people of Canada. Over 18 months ago the committee of the House dealing with transportation visited southwestern Ontario. It went to four cities and towns, Stratford, London, Chatham and Walkerton, the county town of Bruce County which I have the honour to represent. Twenty members of parliament representing all parties in the House were sent to those places to look into railway passenger service as provided by the CNR as well as by the CPR in that particular locality. I will not tell you what went on at the various committee meetings; I will merely say that those members of parliament were so impressed by what they heard that they made a report to this House. It was signed by all 20 members who represented all parties in the House. That report recommended to parliament and to the government that passenger service in that area be reinstated immediately. I am sad to say that that passenger service has not been reintroduced in accordance with the wishes of the committee.

I know members of parliament cannot demand that the government do certain things, obviously. However, I say with respect that when 20 members of parliament representing all parties in the House recommend a certain thing, that thing should be looked into most seriously. It has not been looked into seriously by any means.

We took this matter up with the Minister of Transport. Many members representing all parties in this House have taken up this matter with him. I repeat, respectfully, that that committee report recommended that certain passenger service be reinstated immediately. That service did not involve Ottawa, Vancouver, Montreal or Toronto. I believe Kitchener was involved. The service to which I have referred does not affect the western or eastern parts of Canada. It affects that particular area of southwestern Ontario which I mentioned.

The Minister of Transport has said, under repeated questioning by many hon. members, that he does not have the power to restore the train service, and that the Canadian Transport Commission, established by an act of parliament, runs the whole show. May I remind you of something that happened several months ago. When Bell Telephone came before the Canadian Transport Commission for a rate increase, the government, for reasons unknown to me—and I am speaking as a private member and giving my personal view—rolled back the rate increase awarded to Bell Telephone. If the government can do this with respect to telephone rates, it can do something with respect to the railways.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whicher: If the Minister of Transport wishes to reinstate the train service in southwestern Ontario, he can do it. If he thinks he cannot do it, all he has to do is come before parliament with a bill. I suggest, although I cannot speak for my friends in the opposition, that we, on my side of the House, would give the minister any powers which are necessary for restoring this train service. But, no, he will not do it. We should look at this situation closely.

[Mr. Whicher.]

Many arguments have been brought forward and many constructive criticisms have been made during the present debate, as well as in years gone by. However, I have spoken of one problem that faces us at the moment. Included in that committee report was a suggestion that after the trains were put back in service, there would be consultations with the federal, provincial and municipal officials as well as the railways to try to develop the most economical method of transportation in that particular area. There should be a meeting. It may very well be it may not be necessary to have two trains running into the same city or town on the same day. I will give an example of this.

● (1620)

The city of Owen Sound, a city of just over 20,000 people with another 10,000 in the surrounding district, before the edict of the CTC removing the train service, was served by not only a daily CPR train, but a CNR train. No one in his right mind, in this day and age, would suggest there should be two trains, but for many years there was CP and CN daily service. On a certain day, this service was cut off. There has not been one train since, in spite of the fact the restoration of the service was recommended to the Minister of Transport. The committee's report to parliament suggested that, after the re-initiation of passenger service, there should be meetings to discuss these matters. To give a hypothetical example, perhaps there should be only three trains a week into Owen Sound. Perhaps there should be twice-weekly service or service five times a week. The point is that previously there was seven-day service from two railways.

We asked that the most economical transportation system be developed. This request has been absolutely ignored by the Minister of Transport. I remind hon. members that the subsidies on these trains were something in the nature of three quarters of a million dollars yearly. I am completely against subsidies if something else can be done about the situation. If three quarters of a million dollars is too much, perhaps it should be cut to one half or one quarter million dollars. The people of southwestern Ontario see that the government is able to find hundreds of millions of dollars to increase old age pensions and veterans pensions. They see that the government has increased the tax exemption from \$1,000 to \$1,500 in one year's time. I feel these people have a very legitimate complaint.

Is three quarters of a million dollars too much of a subsidy for the breadbasket of Canada? I do not use the word "breadbasket" in a boastful way. I want some action. As western members know, one third of the agricultural produce of the whole of Canada comes from the province of Ontario. A great deal comes from the area I am speaking about at the present time. I feel there should be some type of service to that area. A magnificent tower costing millions of dollars is being built in the city of Toronto, perhaps justifiably so. I understand it will be the highest tower in the world. The people in my area are glad to see that, if it is necessary to have the highest tower in the world, costing many millions of dollars. They do not have anything against that. However, they think that passenger service should be re-initiated in southwestern Ontario,