

*Branch Railway Lines*

any disposition in that direction I intend to make the kind of speech that I think is appropriate to the resolution and not attempt in any way to deal with the provisions of the bill itself except in the most general terms.

The resolution suggests that it is expedient to introduce a piece of legislation of a character that I was almost going to say was revolutionary. It certainly involves a number of fundamental changes in our concept of railways in Canada. I sometimes think that, over the years, railways in Canada have caused almost as much emotion and certainly as much controversy as flags and almost as much as languages. It is not surprising that this should be so because throughout the whole of our history since confederation, in fact even from the time of the union of 1840, railways have been the bony structure of the body politic in Canada. Perhaps this was truer in our generation of western Canada than of eastern Canada—I speak as one in his sixtieth year—but in western Canada the train whistle was really in many ways the call of civilization. It was the signal of the one thing that really connected each isolated community, some of them very much so indeed, with the rest of the country and the rest of the world. I think that the whistle of the old steam locomotive, which has gone into history, went into history just about the time that the railway ceased to be a quasi monopoly in transportation. I think there are still a good many of us who have got the habit of thinking that the railways are the only form of transportation which really matters in Canada. This is no longer true. For a long time, in many parts of the world and in many parts of Canada, the railway was the only effective means of transportation of persons or goods. It was a quasi monopoly, if not an actual monopoly, depending on where you happened to be.

At the outset the railways received from this parliament relatively rigid regulation. Even so, regulation was relaxed and relaxed considerably, in those parts of the country where alternative forms of transport were really important. This has always been true in areas where water transportation on our unique waterways competed with the railways. I think many of us who did not have the good fortune to live in areas where there was that kind of competition, which kept rates down, were rather envious of the advantages of those who did. With the development of hard surfaced heavy duty roads, with the trans-Canada highway which, although it is far from complete, does now give

us an all Canadian road from one coast to the other, with the remarkable development of the air lines not only in carrying passengers but also in carrying freight, it is no longer true that the railways have a monopoly in most parts of this country for most kinds of traffic.

It is true that in certain remote areas the railway is the only effective means of transport. It is true also for certain kinds of goods. I suppose in this respect the most important single commodity is wheat. The railway in many parts of the country is still the principal carrier of wheat, the only other effective means of carriage being by water, where that is available.

It has been apparent I think for a number of years that a great leap forward was needed in our thinking about rail transportation and about the relationship of parliament and government to rail transportation. This leap forward would recognize the fact that the railways no longer, except in those rather limited areas to which I have referred, have a monopoly. There is competition which in many respects is very effective, and in some respects so effective that the railways are losing the traffic almost completely. Under these conditions it is surely better to allow the forces of competition to provide the regulation than to seek to provide it, generally somewhat out of date, by law.

Some years ago under the previous administration a royal commission was set up. This of course has been the pattern over the years, that at each important stage of development in our railways, we have used this rather useful device for having a hard look at the railways taken by really competent people. This most recent commission was not under one chairmanship. Unfortunately, for reasons of health, the chairman was not able to continue but found a very worthy successor in Mr. MacPherson who, although our views might differ politically, I think the house would be united in agreeing is a man of utmost integrity, great competence and vast experience in this field. This commission had a number of other able members. They provided us more than two years ago with a report which certainly deserves our respect. This does not mean, of course, we should blindly accept every recommendation that was made by fallible men who could make errors in judgment. But I am bound to say that when the present government was faced with the problem of deciding what if anything should be done about this problem—and it certainly called for some drastic action