

Transportation

It is time for us in this country to make our transportation companies serve the people rather than profits, and while I would be the first to admit that the Liberal government has been a failure at improving the facilities for moving freight, it has been a disaster at improving facilities for moving people.

During the last election campaign the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) promised \$290 million over five years to improve urban transit with the government contributing to capital improvements. That promise has never been kept. The actual program announced last year involves little or no new funding, and now we see the CPR increasing its commuter fares in Montreal by 35 per cent and the CNR increasing its fares by 50 per cent.

During the last election campaign the Prime Minister promised to establish transcontinental excursion trains to supplement existing transcontinental services. Instead, the Liberals want to cut back transcontinental service across Canada. The government had a report prepared by IBI consultants recommending abandonment of two of the three long distance services between Montreal and the maritimes.

During the 1974 election campaign the Prime Minister promised to bring into service high speed trains to serve the Quebec City to Windsor corridor, Atlantic Canada to Quebec, Edmonton to Calgary, and Vancouver to Chilliwack. That was five years ago and not one new train has been put into service since then. In fact, we have lost trains. The government has only ten train sets on order for the whole of Canada. That will not even replace old equipment that is and will have to be scrapped. We will end up even further behind than we are now.

The train from Ottawa to Toronto takes five and three-quarter hours at an average speed of 48 miles per hour. The train from Edmonton to Calgary averages only 55 miles per hour, and the government's agency, VIA Rail, plans to abandon that service. No wonder no one will get on the train when a jackrabbit could make the trip quicker. Until we get high speed inter-city trains that average 125 miles per hour to 150 miles per hour, we will not have an incentive for people to leave their automobiles at home and take the train instead of the bus or the plane.

I note that in Alberta the NDP has promised to spend \$500 million to improve the Edmonton to Calgary rail corridor. That is the kind of program needed across Canada, in the maritimes, in central Canada and in the west. Massive investment is required to improve our railways, the most efficient energy mode of travel following water carriage. By improving our railway system's capability to carry people we will improve its capability to move freight. That would mean more jobs and more industrial development.

The Liberals promised to revamp the entire grain handling system in 1974, from the farmer's granary to the ships in the harbour. They promised a national freight car leasing corporation and to purchase a reserve freight car fleet. That has not happened.

[Mr. Benjamin.]

I want to remind the Minister of Transport that if he were to enforce section 262 of the Railway Act, which provides that the railway shall provide suitable accommodation to load, transport and unload all traffic offered, and if he implemented the major recommendation of the Hall commission on statutory rates, the railroads would have the funds to rebuild and rehabilitate the railway lines and to purchase cars and locomotives. They would have the majority of the funds needed. The Government of Canada could advance any additional funds at low interest that the railways may need.

It is not just the lack of grain cars that is causing a problem. Since the end of the Second World War we have been short of rolling stock. If you talk to the potato growers in P.E.I. and New Brunswick, they will tell you the problem has existed for 50 years, that they have never had sufficient cars to move their crops. If you talk to the fruit and vegetable growers in southern Ontario, they will tell you there is never enough equipment. Talk to the hon. member for Medicine Hat (Mr. Hargrave). He and thousands of others in the cattle business will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there has always been a shortage of stock cars when the time comes to move their livestock.

Talk to the people in the lumber industry, Mr. Speaker. When a major shipment of lumber is to be moved for export and to the domestic market, there is a chronic shortage of railway rolling stock, and that is the case with commodity after commodity. The railways have never lived up to their legal liability under the Railway Act of Canada.

● (1630)

The minister talked about 700 million to 800 million bushel years, and that is great. The tragedy is that in the past year we could have had another three million tonnes of sales to China, a country which prefers to deal with us. The Chinese are grateful for the good and fair treatment which we have given them over the years. The Wheat Board could not tender because they knew they could not deliver an additional three million tonnes and that there was insufficient rail capacity to move that additional grain to the west coast. The Canadian Wheat Board commissioner said that the prairie farmers had lost \$450 million, or \$3,000 each, during the calendar year 1978 because of Canada's inability to deliver more grain for export.

The board has identified the number one problem in grain transportation as lack of grain cars. The railways continue to take an average of 1,800 boxcars out of grain service each year and, as a result, the farmers have been blackmailed into paying for 2,000 new hopper cars, which is the responsibility of the railways and of the government. I do not condemn the Canadian Wheat Board. I do not like the fact that they had to order hopper cars, but it was a desperate, last resort move which it felt it had to make to protect our export markets and to provide us with the capacity to move the volume of grain we are moving now.

We welcomed and supported the purchase of 8,000 cars by the government. But the Minister of Transport has been