

Provision of Moneys to CNR and Air Canada

relation to the abandonment of rail lines as well as to the obtaining of increased freight rates. It is amusing for a westerner to listen to eastern members talking about problems created by the CNR in many eastern constituencies. For years we in the west have faced such problems, and we know all the tricks the CPR has indulged in to downgrade passenger service and freight service in some areas. Actually, in one community in my constituency the CPR took the telephone out of the railroad station, so that people could not telephone to find out when the freight would arrive. When the railway wants to abandon a service it does things like this, and then goes before the Transport Commission saying, "There is no need for service". The Commission apparently swallows that story. Apparently, it does not examine the question of the public's interest. In the field of transportation perhaps I am a socialist. I believe that the people of Canada are prepared to pay any deficit that is necessary to satisfy the public interest in this field. Transport is as important as our postal service. It is essential and we must maintain it, even if in so doing it costs us money.

● (3:50 p.m.)

This article reads:

—and in many cases have been granted it—to discontinue service on unprofitable branch lines.

I doubt whether they are unprofitable, Mr. Speaker.

Where they have been required to continue the service at a financial loss, they have been recompensed through subsidies; and after 1975 such subsidies will be tied directly to any losses suffered on services that are being maintained as a necessary public service.

But it is one thing to abandon unprofitable branch lines; it is quite another thing to give up all passenger service across the nation. And the CPR must know that its request will not, and should not, be granted, for a number of reasons.

I can also include the Canadian National Railways in that statement, Mr. Speaker.

One is that train passenger service in some areas is the only satisfactory way of getting people from one place to another. It is true that buses, airlines and trucking companies have taken much business away from the railways in recent years.

This again, Mr. Speaker, does not paint the true picture because who now operates those bus and truck lines? Any line that is profitable has been purchased by the railway companies. I think in western Canada we see more CP trucks than those of any other trucking firm in the area. The CPR knows it is cheaper to transport a short distance in this manner.

[Mr. McIntosh.]

They also have airlines in their set-up. It is much cheaper to transport people by air than by rail. As the hon. member for Edmonton Centre (Mr. Paproski) said last night, this railway company also has shares in the bus companies. They are bound to win! What we, as members of Parliament are forgetting is that we must see that the public interest is served. I do not think we are doing it by blindly passing a bill such as the one before us without more explanation. I continue quoting:

None the less, in some areas, rail passenger service remains a highly important service. Transcontinental service, on which the CPR claims to have lost nearly \$20 million last year on its trains between Montreal-Toronto and Vancouver, is a case in point.

The hon. member for Edmonton Centre pointed out yesterday that anyone who reads such a statement by the CPR, and who has made efforts to get reservations on these trains will be hard pressed to believe such a statement. On many occasions prior to the first attempt to abandon passenger service on Canadian transcontinental trains, I was unable to make a definite commitment as to my time of arrival at a certain destination because I was not sure that I could get reservations. Even an hour before I departed, I was not sure if I had a reservation on the train. There was something wrong. The lack of service was either deliberate or a revision of the reservation system was needed. Computers could be used. The railways say they are losing money because of low freight rates. How do they arrive at that conclusion if they are not good with figures? This was a subterfuge because the railways were leading up to the suggestion that has already been put forward to abandon passenger service. I continue quoting:

None the less, in some areas, rail passenger service remains a highly important service. Transcontinental service, on which the CPR claims to have lost nearly \$20 million last year on its trains between Montreal-Toronto and Vancouver, is a case in point. These trains, at least in summer, are well patronized—as anyone who has travelled on them will agree. They provide service between major cities and towns—the only service in many cases other than aircraft and buses. But many people find a long bus trip too exhausting. Many people, even in this enlightened day and age are reluctant to fly.

There is quite a large group in that category, Mr. Speaker.

These are strong reasons in themselves for the continuation of transcontinental train service.