

structure of the railway remains a problem which has not been touched. The fact is that railway services, including passenger service, have been rapidly going downhill, have been ignored, as has the whole question of freight rates and the need for the major changes which I have mentioned briefly. We feel these matters are so important that this bill should not go through the House until they have been dealt with. The only way to get the attention of the government is to endeavour to hold up the bill for sufficient time to give the government and the department the chance to discuss adequately both in committee and in this House the points I have listed.

• (2110)

Mr. Bill Knight (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, I have listened for several days now to this most interesting debate about the money to be made available to the CNR and our air transportation system. I often wonder how many pages of *Hansard* have been filled with suggestions and proposals each year as this particular debate comes forward. I wonder how many years of Canadian history have been spent discussing and debating railroad transportation policies. The railroads in this country have been tied so closely to history that one might think the history of this nation concerned little else.

We look back at history and find that governments have helped build the CPR by continually granting it sums of money, money given to a private corporation that is based upon profit for its shareholders. We reached a point where the CPR might not have been finished and may have brought the Macdonald government to its knees had it not been for those people living in Saskatchewan who supplied the country with rebellion. The role of the CPR in the building of the west is an interesting one. The railroad was paid off by the granting of land in the west. In the area around Weyburn and west of Weyburn there are many farmers farming quarter sections, half sections and whole sections which were originally CPR land. Railroads such as the CPR and the ones that followed were built on an assumption of an exploitative nature and were not based on any concept of service. Railroads built through the west were built mainly on the basis of bringing people into the west to provide a market for industrial goods from the east.

Throughout the years the railroads, through their freight rates and possibly at one time through their passenger service, accrued vast amounts of revenue from people living in the west. That revenue was used by the railroads, I suppose, in all parts of Canada, and this may well be justifiable. But in the course of time the very railroads that accrued a large amount of revenue from the west continued to erode the kind of service that the people of western Canada and of Canada generally deserved from its railway system. And each year this government continues to bail out, if I may put it that way, this particular system of transportation and to neglect the overriding problem of developing a national transportation policy for Canada.

This afternoon the Minister of Transport (Mr. Jamieson) made a speech—finally—in which he talked about this and that and about his department and what it is doing in the Maritimes. But as he went on he continued to ignore the

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real necessity for sitting down and deciding what the national transportation policy of Canada is going to be.

What is the justification for building two new airports? What is the justification behind some of the railroads' application to dispense with station agents in the prairie west? In Saskatchewan over the years we have seen continual attempts by the railroads to cut back on the kind of service needed by western farmers. We have seen these railway corporations, whether it be the CPR or the CNR, with the backing, as far as I am concerned, of the federal government, withdraw the services of station agents on some kind of pretence that the public will get better service from a servo-centre when there is no proof at all that a servo-centre will serve the needs of the people in the west.

The Canadian Transport Commission, headed by its impartial chairman, implements policies that allow the railroads to curtail the role of the station agent. I suppose in coming years when that commission deals with the question of rail line abandonment we will again see its impartial chairman implement policies to abandon railway lines in Saskatchewan with no regard for the effect on various communities and the farmers involved, who will be given no alternative mode of transportation with which to market their goods.

The people in my riding have expressed real concern that many of the railway lines that service their communities, such as the line running from the town of Radville east to the town of Goodwater, may possibly be abandoned. They are concerned that the line running west from Radville through to Willow Bunch may be on the chopping block, that the line running through Coronach may also be on the chopping block and that the railways may apply to abandon the line running west of Estevan. As long as the government allows a kind of non-policy activity on the part of the Department of Transport, we will continue to see the eroding of services that are needed by Canadians.

Many farmers and people living in the rural areas of my riding have pointed out to me, as I have myself noticed, that service of the track running through the area is not up to par. The track is continually neglected and many parts are in need of service. The gauge of the track is far below what is required by modern diesels. Some of it is as low as 85 gauge, when it should have a gauge of somewhere around 120. Until the government commits itself to a national transportation policy we will continue to see the railways being allowed to carry out such unfair practices.

The freight rates association announced that on February 11 freight rates would be increased from 3 per cent to 8 per cent on approximately one-third of the goods carried by the railway. General grain and grain products are subject to the rate increase except where covered by statutory rates and traffic moving under agreed charges. Such increases are unwarranted at a time when the farmers of western Canada are facing economic difficulties in terms of ever-rising costs of production and low prices received for their commodities.

Once again I suggest there is need for a national transportation policy for all Canada. If this nation is to be held together as a single country, an attempt must be made to