

Canadian National Railways and Air Canada

points and sales centres. They cannot get it into the United States or eastern Canada. Lumber prices have been slipping lately. And all these losses arise because Canadian National has been sitting on that portion of its anatomy which does the least good—I used a much shorter word on an earlier occasion; everybody knows what it is, so there is no point in repeating it.

The only response the Minister of Transport has given the House so far has been to throw up his hands and say: Everybody has problems, Mr. Speaker. Oh, the actual words he used are in *Hansard*; he did not use those words, but that is what they amounted to. Even the B.C. Railway has difficulties, he told us. This is why I was prompted to say that the B.C. Railway had the foresight last spring to look ahead and prepare to deal with the problem, but not the government whose ministers sit over there and not the Canadian National. It is a sad state of affairs.

All we are asking for is the same sort of consideration as the federal government extends when it comes to the movement of grain. Maybe not even that. I do not mean we should dig into the public treasury right now and put out \$46 million to build 2,000 cars—as a matter of fact, if we were to build flatcars we could build many more than that for \$46 million. This does not appear to be the answer. What I am asking for is the appointment of someone as overseer who can say to the Canadian National, in this instance, or to the Canadian Pacific to the extent they are involved: In the national interest and in the regional interest you will provide boxcars in this area where they are needed. That is all. I am asking for the same consideration as has been given to grain farmers on a number of occasions. Why should northern British Columbia continue to suffer and be disadvantaged because of, first, the incompetence of the senior management when it comes to looking beyond the end of their noses and, second, the aloofness of the federal government which so far, has done nothing but say: Everybody has problems.

May we not expect a little response to be forthcoming this afternoon, through you, Mr. Speaker? I know the Minister of Transport came to the House in the hope of entering this debate and telling us why this difficulty continues to exist. I, for one, will listen with the most rapt attention I could possibly give. I trust he will assure us that the problem is on the way to being solved in British Columbia—that we do not need to worry about this any more. Will the minister say that?

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): Yes, I can say that in a few words, if you will allow me to do so, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the minister proposing to make a speech? I do not want to become too technical, but possibly the minister should make his observations by way of a question to the hon. member.

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): Yes, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately for the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard) I never used the words he attributed to me. Indeed, I never said anything comparable to them. I just explained the reason for the shortage of rail cars in British Columbia. I gave two or three reasons, the first being the growth in the activity of the industry. A year or two ago this was forecast at 6 per cent. It turned out to be around 14 per

cent. This was the first mistake. Everybody made this mistake. There is great activity, great prosperity, a real boom. The CNR did not forecast it. The BCR did not forecast it. Neither did the CPR. Even the British Columbia government did not forecast such a rate of growth.

The second reason is that all the railways order cars which will be used exclusively for the carriage of lumber. The CN ordered 2,000 cars of which more than 1,000 would have been used only for lumber transportation. I believe the BCR ordered 1,500 rail cars for lumber, and the CPR ordered around 1,000. But because of the strike in the steel industry, delivery of these cars could not be obtained. I believe the railway strike, too, was responsible for a good deal of the backlog. These are the reasons I put forward—not because “Everybody has problems”; I never said that. The answer I gave was the one I have just re-stated. The hon. member for Skeena says 4,000 cars are needed immediately. I would like him to indicate to me how I can, in a short time, get 4,000 cars for that part of British Columbia. If he can suggest any means of achieving that objective, I am ready to adopt it tomorrow.

● (1600)

Mr. Howard: That is a most interesting question. Let me deal with two aspects of it. In the first place, I said that there is sufficient lumber on the ground now that it would take 4,000 boxcars to move it. I did not say “Put 4,000 boxcars in tomorrow”; do not be ridiculous. But there is that volume of lumber sitting there, and according to estimates it would take up to 4,000 cars to move that lumber.

Secondly, it seems to me that the minister and the government cannot have it both ways. He told us a moment ago that nobody could foresee what was going to take place. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) could see; that is what his budget last spring was all about. This is the Minister of Finance's persistent answer in the House these days about economic questions. He hearkens back to the spring of this year and says “We predicted this and it is going to get better in 1974”. The Minister of Transport cannot turn around and say “We didn't foresee that; we didn't know”. Of course he knew, and the government of British Columbia knew. The premier of B.C. is president of the B.C. railroad. That railroad took action in the spring of this year—

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): The same for CN.

Mr. Howard: —and had cars built. The premier set up the machinery for building them. The CN did nothing of the sort. CN may have put in an order to somebody to build the cars, but the minister cannot rely on some kind of steel strike for the fact the cars were not built. Canadian National took no such parallel action.

A little while ago the British Columbia railroad leased 500 cars from the United States. It was forced to do so because this government is apparently unable or unwilling to do anything to get the cars needed. Instead of the minister standing up and repeating like a parrot what Canadian Nation tells him, if that is what he is doing, I ask him to appoint somebody to go out to British