

Branch Railway Lines

Mr. Fisher: I hear someone suggesting that perhaps he has learned, but we all remember his last appearance on television.

Mr. Pickersgill: I am never invited. It is only the hon. gentleman who is on television.

Mr. Fairweather: He just wants you to ask him down some Sunday night.

Mr. Fisher: He knows that the door is always open.

One of the things that intrigues me about the recommendations of the royal commission—and this makes me very suspicious, as it makes most railroad employees—is that in only two parts of the country, or two institutions, have I found that these recommendations are really being thought of as wonderful, and those institutions are the president of the C.N.R. and the president of the C.P.R. Mr. Chairman, one would have to be a pretty innocent fellow not to be a little suspicious when Donald Gordon and Mr. Crump are just delighted about the recommendations of the royal commission.

Mr. Moreau: Do not forget the truckers.

Mr. Fisher: I have not heard of any truckers who were delighted, and if it was only the truckers who were against the recommendations I would be suspicious; but aside from one of the major unions which supported the commission's recommendations, with some caveat, I have not heard general enthusiasm for the royal commission's recommendations, except that expressed by Mr. Gordon and Mr. Crump. All I can say is that that should be enough of a guarantee, and enough of a warning, particularly to the people of western Canada in the bridge country, to anticipate that we should look at this legislation very carefully.

Mr. Chairman, one could go into a great deal more detail in respect of this matter. At eight o'clock I was talking with the hon. member for Qu'Appelle who said he really needed several hours to warm up to this particular issue. I feel somewhat similar, but I assume that we will be able to do so when the bill has received second reading and sent to a committee.

I should just like to repeat that I think the farmers and people in those areas of Canada where the competitive modes of transportation are not having their necks wrung, including railways employees and employees of the trucking industry, particularly the long haul, should be concerned and interested in this legislation.

[Mr. Fisher.]

It would just be blind stupidity to condemn legislation completely on the basis of this resolution. I do not really have any particular questions to ask the minister, and I hope that we can get this resolution through and receive the bill tonight. I would like to suggest that when the minister comes to the committee with this legislation he bring with him his usual and normal humility, plus a desire to be more expressive about the transportation policy of the government, because I do not see how he can suggest changes of this magnitude that will affect the whole transportation industry without some inkling as to government long term intentions; and this legislation does not have that. Even if, as I say, someone did place in this resolution a rational plan of approach, the minister cut it out before presenting the resolution.

Mr. Olson: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member for Port Arthur who has just taken his seat mentioned that this was a very complex piece of legislation introduced by the resolution now before us. I think it is fair to say that even that expression is an understatement, particularly when we consider the implications and ramifications which may flow from the legislation apparently to be included in the bill when it is before us.

Generally speaking the resolution before us tonight deals with three main subjects with respect to the transportation policy of Canada. It deals with what is now termed the rationalization of branch lines. As has been pointed out, this is a change from the former wording in that it used to be referred to as the abandonment of branch lines. The resolution also deals with passenger train services and the fixing of freight rates.

This history of transportation in Canada has been written often and well and I do not think anything can be gained tonight by rethrusting old straw. But I think it is fair to say that from the early days of settlement, government bodies have taken an active part in providing and regulating transportation by water, by highway, by rail and more recently by air. Generally the public has insisted that these facilities be operated on a commercial basis, that is, that the users pay the cost of services and operations, but at the same time the welfare of the public and the benefit of the nation as a whole have been a fundamental and persistent objective.

We can say that the history of Canadian transportation involves the interplay of two radically different concepts. On the one hand there are straight business principles, and on