

Newfoundland Rail Transportation

PC party condemns the benign neglect of railway services, now the Liberal government policy in the region.

That was the position of the federal PC party on August 14, and it still is.

Then the provincial Liberals came out against abandoning the railway. Our leader went to Newfoundland and confirmed our position a few days after the caucus meeting here in Ottawa. On August 22, the Newfoundland government came out in opposition to the abandonment of the Newfoundland railway and said it must continue. It stated that under the terms of the union it cannot be abandoned without the consent of both governments. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) was sent a wire to that effect.

Finally, the government broke its silence, and on September 12 the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Jamieson), the cabinet minister from Newfoundland, made a statement which was quoted in the *Evening Telegram* of September 13. He said that the Newfoundland government's decision not to accept that recommendation "puts this particular issue to rest". He went on to say that the Canadian government fully accepted that decision. The article quotes him as stating:

Now that there has been a decision not to consider abandoning the railway, 'the onus is now on all concerned to test the validity of the proposition that rail freight traffic can be increased and the service made more attractive to potential users,' Jamieson said.

This will require, among other things, 'a new sense of commitment on the part of Canadian National Railways. As the designated operator of the system it must accept the decision.'

Jamieson said he has recommended to transport minister Otto Lang, 'that he require the CNR to prepare without delay detailed proposals outlining ways in which rail freight may be made more efficient and attractive.'

What has happened to all those fine words of September 13? The Secretary of State for External Affairs then went on to say that there must be federal-provincial negotiations to agree on an over-all approach to the report's recommendations, and that federal-provincial negotiations "on a very comprehensive scale" must begin right away. When are these very comprehensive negotiations going to begin?

● (1712)

Do you know, Mr. Speaker, that I have been writing the Minister of Transport, (Mr. Lang), with copies to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, since early August? I asked him what action he was going to take on these recommendations, and what steps he was going to take to keep the railway operating in Newfoundland. On August 3 I wrote to the Minister of Transport concerning the bus service. On August 21 I wrote to the Minister of Transport concerning the recommendations for the railway. I pointed out to him that certain trains were being discontinued, that conditions of business were being changed, and that business was leaving the railways because of the uncertainty. I asked him to make a statement. I wrote to the Minister of Transport on September 6, bringing the same things to his attention. Then the Secretary of State for External Affairs spoke in Newfoundland on September 13, and nothing else happened.

[Mr. Crosbie.]

Around October 14 we learned that the CN in Newfoundland was laying off 20 people from its freight service, and cancelling two trains from Corner Brook to St. John's and from Port aux Basques to St. John's on weekends. The minister was questioned in the House on October 17 as to why this was being done, when he promised that there would be no layoffs until the final report of the commission was received. The minister gave us his gobbledygook that there would be no layoffs except those related to changes in the level and flow of business, the ordinary sort. The minister said that he would look into these layoffs, these changes in circumstances, and report to me. I have not heard a word since October 17. We cannot believe or trust the minister one single iota in what he says or does. He is the most untrustworthy, most heartless minister I have ever come across in my long experience, provincially and federally. I still have not heard from him.

Mr. Benjamin: What about Otto?

Mr. Crosbie: I am talking about the Minister of Transport.

Mr. Benjamin: He is the Grit who stole Christmas.

Mr. Crosbie: That was on October 18. Then I learned that not only were these trains being cancelled but that CN was cutting its capital budget for next year in half in Newfoundland, that there would be layoffs of dozens of people in January, that 200 would not be taken on to improve the railbed next summer as a result of the cuts in its capital budget, and that there would be cuts in its maintenance budget. In other words, they are doing in the railway altogether. The CN is determined that it is not going to lose any more money on the Newfoundland railway.

So, I wrote the Secretary of State for External Affairs on October 24, drawing this to his attention. On October 30 I drew the drastic budget cuts to his attention, the fact that CN will not replace personnel, and other details which I do not have the time to give now. Still I have received no answer from either one of those ministers, except a perfunctory acknowledgment of my letters.

I have been asking since August, as well as has the Newfoundland government, for a meeting between the Rail unions, the ministers, and the Newfoundland government. I have been asking the government to tell CN that the government will meet its obligations, that it will meet any cash losses which they can prove are occurring, and that it will meet the necessary capital expenditures on the rail service. I asked for the government to direct them to carry this service on vigorously, or to get someone else in there who will. We cannot even get a meeting six months after this report came down. I wrote the Secretary of State for External Affairs on October 30. He has not responded; he has not arranged a meeting.

But there is a meeting tomorrow with these two ministers and a group from North Sydney and Port aux Basques. That meeting has been arranged since. It is to do with certain events on the CN marine services, where they are now using a private service from Halifax to St. John's, not using CN vessels, and laying off certain marine employees. This is going to affect the