

all the parties concerned on what the technique ought to be. However, the matter is getting ongoing attention, and if a better arrangement can be devised we will be glad to implement it.

I hope that the government and members of this House do not talk out this matter, because I sense that it is time for Canada to move forward in this particular area. Acceptance of my suggestion will afford the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications an opportunity to consider the implications of the principles involved. It will give the government an opportunity to put the final touches to its own bill and at the same time, as I have mentioned, it will provide an opportunity for the committee to go into the subject matter so that when the measure does come from the government, the committee will be in a better position to deal with it.

I thank the government for its consideration in referring this matter to the committee, and at the conclusion of remarks which other hon. members may wish to make, if there is agreement I would be prepared to ask leave of the House to withdraw this bill and the notice of motion standing in my name.

Mr. John Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, I rise to say a few words with respect to this bill. The bill proposes to set up a federal transport commission of inquiry to conduct impartial investigations into transport accidents in Canada. I must say that this step is long overdue. I state unequivocally that I support the principle of this bill. I look at the situation as it exists and see that the transportation commission both regulates and investigates. It regulates transportation in this country, and if there are accidents it investigates them.

I can understand the hon. member's concern about the conflict in such a situation, because in Nickel Belt, where I come from, we experience the same kind of situation, the same kind of conflict. For many years there were accidents in the mines of Inco and Falconbridge, and lo and behold, Inco's security police were called in to investigate the company's accidents. Of course, this neither served the community nor the workers at Inco and Falconbridge. Indeed, it was only after considerable needling by provincial members to the mine safety department of the Conservative provincial government that finally things were changed. So this concern is very well founded.

I confine my remarks specifically to the railways because I have a large segment of railway population in my riding and I have had the opportunity to talk with these workers and to know some of the conditions which prevail on the railroads. When we look at the railroads in this country we find that we are far behind most other countries in relation to legislation which covers, for example, track standards and car equipment. We have no such legislation. The design and construction of freight cars and passenger cars is also not covered by legislation in this country. The design of much of the equipment and the qualifications of employees who operate such equipment are not covered by legislation. It is a well known fact that rail conditions are so poor that engines designed to travel at very high speeds cannot do so. Indeed, there are permanent slow orders on the railroads due to track conditions.

Transport Accidents

It has also been my experience in talking to workers on the railroads that railroad companies have cut back on section men. These are the workers who have specific responsibility for maintaining the railroad. I have found out that since 1950 section men have been put in the position of servicing longer and longer track lengths, and in this way the railway companies have been able to cut back on the number of section men. They may be creating greater profits for themselves, but of course they are placing great hazards on the travelling public and on the communities through which freight trains pass. One can imagine the implications this has on passenger service and movement of freight in this country.

Prior to 1966, the Board of Transport Commissioners published yearly a document setting out all the railway accidents in Canada; but quite mysteriously, since 1966 this has ceased. Indeed, the only such record now is very limited. Since 1966 the commission has produced an annual report of 11 lines, euphemistically entitled "Railway safety program". Prior to 1966 the documentation on railway accidents indicated the railway company concerned, the type of accidents and the number injured or killed on our railways.

It seems to me that this latest, abbreviated report prevents the unions and the workers from zeroing in on particularly hazardous conditions which are repetitive. Unions and workers have been making representations regarding the movement of dangerous commodities, for example propane gas and explosives and, possibly, very shortly nuclear material. The unions are demanding a unified coding system and proper information which should be relayed to the train crews regarding the substances they are transporting and the necessary procedures to be followed in case of emergency situations arising. It seems to me that this matter should not only be of concern to the workers but to every member of this House who is responsible for legislating the safety of Canadians.

To point out that workers are not lax in their desire to ensure safety, and to make sure that they do indeed follow safe procedures, the unions have been demanding safety equipment which would actually travel on the rails. They want the operators of that equipment to be properly qualified and not individuals who have no training in these matters. The railway companies have turned a deaf ear to these most reasonable requests. It is also very obvious that instead of having separate little bureaucratic empires for air, rail and sea, there ought to be one regulatory body which would cover all modes of transportation. It is most disturbing, and it ought to be disturbing to every member of this House, to note that when rail accidents are investigated by the railway transport commission the results are never published and are, in fact, deemed under the Railway Act to be privileged, unlike investigations into air and sea accidents. Reports of air and sea accidents are not considered to be privileged information.

Superimposed on this mess is the latest decision of Mr. Justice Emmett Hall regarding the crew consist under which the companies will be permitted to cut train crews by one. The railway unions have made extensive representations regarding the dangers inherent in this