

*Canadian National Railways and Air Canada*

I sometimes think of burning this pass as a protest against their insulting service or their lack of service in certain cases.

The city of Edmundston, which is the chief town of the Madawaska-Victoria riding is the center of CN operations for northwestern New Brunswick. This is only logical. It is also more than that because Edmundston is the operations center for most of the railway line between Moncton and Lévis, over several hundred miles.

Edmundston is a key location for the CNR. For years, many people have found employment there but they have been concerned for several years by the centralization of services and certain operations in Moncton where a true administrative empire is being established. I am also worried about this decline which may be compared to a sacrifice on the altar of technology.

If it is truly impossible to repatriate the many jobs lost in the name of progress to the benefit of bigger centres, the railway could at least modernize its facilities in this city and spend there a small portion of the hundreds of millions of dollars allowed almost yearly by the government. A small amount is spent every year but very little. For example, the time has come to replace the dilapidated old buildings which are housing certain services of the marshalling yard, repair workshops, etc.

Rightly so, the city of Edmundston is proud to be the capital of the Madawaska republic but it is afflicted by a blemish which partly soils its charm.

When going along, for example, St-François St., we cannot miss behind a not overly old station as well as warehouses also not too old, it is true, wooden buildings which seem to be on the verge of collapsing at the slightest breeze.

Such is my personal reaction each time I go in there and I am always in a hurry to get out. However, the CNR should understand me well and I know that my speeches are read and that the CNR authorities always listen carefully when I speak about them in this House or in committee. I do not mean that they always answer my prayers, but at least they hear me.

I do not want those old buildings to be demolished and the services and jobs they lodge to be transferred elsewhere. Far from me this thought. I would like, as do the people who have to work there, to see modern facilities, warm in winter, comfortable in summer, some additions to the shops and the creation of new jobs.

With all due respect to the working class across this country, the kind of workmen who are found in Madawaska-Victoria and in Edmundston are a separate group, very hard-working, earnest, busy, qualified and willing to progress in every field. It was said again and again and I am proud to repeat it on every possible occasion: the greatest resource of my constituency is its human capital and the corporations that come to take advantage of this resource are wise including many businesses that are encouraged by the financial assistance program of the federal department of Regional Economic Expansion, businesses that later become customers for our railway companies and contribute to their development. I suggest that in turn, these railway companies should take more initiative.

[Mr. Corbin.]

I feel, Mr. Speaker, to deal with another aspect of the problem, that members of parliament and the leaders of the Canadian National are usually far from one another in their consultations and that they never meet. It is always the same old story. One day, the CN authorities announce a decision without, on most occasions, consulting municipal, provincial or federal authorities, Chambers of commerce or the management of regional development companies.

This results in a general outcry when the announcement is made. They all feel frustrated as a result of unilateral decisions that affect the economic conditions of a whole region. They then shower abuse on one another, they express their dissatisfaction. And yet, the CN should understand that the people's representatives, at all levels in a given area, must also fulfil a mandate, are responsible and deserve our confidence before so many decisions are taken. Oh, they would say, the CNR could never make the decision. There would be too much political interference. This, Mr. Speaker, could always be a possibility. But anything likely to improve relations between the representatives of the people and the railway companies in Canada,—I specially think of the Canadian National Railways—would be worth testing. This is a question of mutual confidence. I, for one who at one time strongly criticized the CNR, have the impression at times that the future could be more readily based on true dialogue and not the type or irreversible, unilateral action which we all witnessed in the past.

• (2140)

What is stopping that company in each riding or group or ridings from gathering members of parliament from time to time, that is those who want to know about the operations of railway companies, to talk to them about their projects, their needs, their problems in labour relations?

Quite impressive amounts from the public point of view, and that includes us all, are being spent in the form of advertising of all kinds but little case seems to be made of members of parliament in their capacity as representatives of the people. The CNR seems to be satisfied to force members of parliament to dig out the facts as best they can in the House through questions put to the minister responsible for it, through questions on the order paper that can be easily avoided under various pretexts, through examination in committee where the game we feel is not so much to inform or instruct hon. members but to hide the most facts possible.

If that continues, Mr. Speaker, the representatives of the people might react in a surprising way one of these days and the citizens of this country could wake up one morning to hear the newscaster with the other Crown corporation—the one which has to do with broadcasting—say that the night before the House of Commons refused to grant the CNR the votes they were requesting. This is of course a hypothetical situation that should in no way be interpreted as a threat. But I feel that after nearly six years in this House of Commons there is a feeling of frustration on all sides such that that could well happen.

Mr. Speaker, I could continue on but for brevity's sake, I join in my mind my intervention tonight with all those