

Canadian National Railways and Air Canada

al Railways system and Air Canada for the period from the 1st day of January, 1973, to the 30th day of June, 1974, and to authorize the guarantee by Her Majesty of certain securities to be issued by the Canadian National Railway Company and certain debentures to be issued by Air Canada, as reported (with amendments) from the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, and motions Nos. 1 and 2 (Mr. Blenkarn).

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, transportation is becoming more important to development in Canada, and as its form changes obviously the attitude of Canadians to transportation will have to progress with the times. Last evening I mentioned that Canadians now have a chance to take a new direction with respect to the development of rail transportation, following the retirement of the President of Canadian National Railways after a long and faithful career devoted to the railroad industry. In appointing a new president I hope the government will keep in mind the opportunities now existing to develop a new direction for Canadian National.

The two amending motions before us suggest that extra money be made available for transportation. One of the sacrifices I suggest is CN Tower Limited, which is building a most prestigious tower surpassing in size and height everything else in the city of Toronto, and the purpose of which is reported to be the installation of an antenna to allow better communications to be undertaken by Canadian National.

I am in agreement with those who say that the fundamental responsibility of Canadian National is to operate transportation facilities, and that less attention should be paid to the fringe elements which, rightly or wrongly, Canadian National has accumulated in its portfolio over the years. As a matter of fact, the only changes made in the transportation system have been disadvantageous. We are now providing service to fewer rail passengers and will be encountering immediate difficulties in transporting freight. Allowing Canadian National to continue expenditures in fields other than transportation is not in the interests of transportation as it should develop in Canada within the next decade.

● (1510)

The hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre (Mr. Benjamin) has just mentioned the fact that Canadian National has been operating two trains out of Toronto one minute apart. If there is anything more idiotic than that, I have yet to hear of it. It might be more advantageous to use two engines and twice as many cars in one train. We do not use one engine with ten boxcars on a freight train, and then five minutes later send out another train with as many boxcars. We have used as many as five engines and 220 boxcars. It seems to me that this would be the logical way to operate a passenger service. The discussions that have taken place have amply demonstrated that the management of Canadian National is not seriously considering the problems that we have with transportation and is not doing anything about them.

It is interesting to note that a number of hon. members have voted for a safety report that was specially commissioned. It is also interesting to recall that the former member for Moose Jaw, John Skoberg, continually pointed

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

out that these safety regulations were being violated. Solutions were offered to most of the safety problems encountered by the Canadian National and other railways. These problems are well known; they are certainly well known to the people who work on the railroads. I think they are also known to everyone connected with safety in both the Canadian Safety Association and the provincial associations. Now, we have a study which again indicates that changes have to take place before we can develop a modern, up-to-date and viable transportation facility. It is, therefore, necessary to consider the amendments that are before us in terms of whether they help in providing a transportation facility. It is my opinion that they do not. They may produce some effect on the communication facility, but they do not provide any type of facility that will assist in the transportation arrangements in this nation. One wonders if money saved in that field could be better used in other fields.

I have no quarrel with the Canadian National building the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal. The station is in the basement and there are complete services in the hotel for the travelling public, some of whom arrive by train. But this parliament allowed the stupid mistake—one that I tried to prevent—of moving the rail facilities from downtown Ottawa. The late Alex Caron and I should probably have our names engraved on the Convention Centre which used to be Union Station because that is all we were able to salvage from the old railway station. If we had trains arriving in downtown Ottawa and downtown Montreal today, we obviously would not be considering STOL aircraft flying from Rockcliffe to Ste. Hélène Island in Montreal in order to provide rapid transit. This would have been provided by rail had the railway station not been moved four or five miles away from the core of Ottawa while the Montreal station remained in the core of the city. It may be to our advantage to keep the downtown core connected by rapid transit and the best way to do that may be to maintain facilities in the core of cities. But the CNR towers in Toronto do not accomplish that; they are not providing that type of facility and there is no indication that the employees of the business offices in the towers will use rail transportation. The railroad is obviously not going to move from Union Station to the CNR tower in Toronto. That is a prestigious office building which involves the investment portfolio of the Canadian National Railways but it does not provide a transportation facility.

If the government is wise in its appointment of a new president for the Canadian National Railways we will be looking at rapid ground transportation into the high Arctic, as well as in the east and in the west, and the provision of transportation to meet the needs of the people of this country, rather than a CNR tower.

Mr. Elmer M. MacKay (Central Nova): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a few brief remarks in support of the amendment presently before this House which was proposed by the hon. member for Mississauga (Mr. Blenkarn). It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that the fact that this piece of legislation is before us under these particular circumstances, indicates some rather poor administrative and legislative procedures in the government's handling of this important