

Canadian National Railways and Air Canada

but the fact is the government of Canada responded to a shortage of railway cars for grain shipments. All we in northern British Columbia are asking for is similar consideration. We are disadvantaged because of a shortage of boxcars.

The provincial government in British Columbia foresaw this problem last spring. It took steps to deal with the matter at that time. By looking ahead, it knew there would be a shortage and there would likely be an additional shortage in the future. They moved to protect the interests of the communities in that area while CNR did its best to obscure and work against that concept. The British Columbia government recently began leasing 500 railway cars from a United States company. It is ridiculous that a national government, national parliament and national railway are unable or unwilling to cope with the question of a shortage of boxcars and are forcing a provincially owned railway to go to a foreign country to lease boxcars when they are built here in Canada. That is a ridiculous situation. It prompts me to ask whether anyone damn well cares what happens in this country. It certainly does not appear to be the case with respect to this government in view of its response to this problem.

The Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) was asked about this the other day. His answer is recorded in *Hansard*. He replied that the railways have problems, everyone has problems and he does not know what to do about them. We tried to tell him what to do. Representations were made to the federal government. When this situation occurred before, the government appointed a boxcar coordinator. He had authority to give directions to the national railways of this nation to provide boxcars to areas short of them. We are again asking the Minister of Transport to appoint someone to the position of co-ordinator. I do not care what name is given to the position. He should have authority to look into the matter of boxcar shortages and give some direction to the railroads to ensure that the boxcars that belong to the people of this country are available to them, rather than having them on a siding somewhere for 40 or 50 days being used as warehouses.

Possibly someone from the Canadian Transport Commission could be appointed. I do not suggest the president, Mr. Benson, because he proved how incompetent he is when Minister of Finance. He is doing worse now. I suggest it should be someone with some expertise from the Canadian Transport Commission, a group that was set up to deal with transportation matters. This man should be sent to British Columbia, but not on a one-way ticket. We want him to come back. He should look at the situation and determine what is involved by talking to the mill owners, the Council of Forest Industries and the provincial government.

Mr. Rose: Send the standing committee.

Mr. Howard: I would not agree to that. The members of the standing committee are political people. They know the problem. It is the CTC and the Minister of Transport who do not know the problem. Possibly it would do some good to send the minister to western Canada. However, I do not want to get into an argument about who should go.

[Mr. Howard.]

I suggested someone from the CTC because that group was set up to function in this area.

Rather than wait until this bill gets to committee, we should demand right now that the CNR discontinue its pro rata system of distribution of boxcars. CNR should be asked why the sawmill companies on the northern line must truck their lumber to Prince George to be shipped in what few boxcars are available. They should be asked why the distribution of boxcars to mill points was discontinued. Why are mill owners being forced to pay between \$5 and \$15 a thousand to have their lumber hauled into Prince George when the railway runs right by their mills? Why did the railways scrap that system?

• (1550)

The minister is aware of all this if he reads his mail. In fact, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) gave him a directive to look into this situation. The Prime Minister referred the subject matter to the Minister of Transport a week or so ago. On the fifth day of October, a letter was sent to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister had no need, really, to refer that letter to the Minister of Transport, because the Minister of Transport already had a copy of it. But the Prime Minister formally said: That is Jean Marchand's baby and he will look after it.

In that letter sent to the Prime Minister by Alf Nunweiler, who is the MLA for Fort George, all the facts are set out. Mr. Nunweiler knows the situation as intimately from the point of view of a railroader as can anybody, because he worked for the Canadian National for a number of years both in Smithers and in Prince George. This is his work every day, and he knows at first hand what the situation is. He says, in this letter:

This is forcing industries from distant centres which already have a railway (BCR) on their millsites, to truck millions of feet of lumber to Prince George where the CNR then provides them with cars. At the moment, the CNR yards in Prince George are literally plugged with piles of lumber trucked in from places like Williams Lake, 100 Mile House, Quesnel, Hixon, Bear Lake, Mackenzie and others at exorbitant costs—about \$5 to \$15 per BFM, meaning higher cost of production.

In past years, the CNR distributed cars for industry at these points on a pro-rata ratio based on regional loading needs to protect the regional economy and the public. Government railways are there to provide transportation services to the public, not to harass the public, especially in resource regions like this one where established railways are the lifeblood of the regional economy.

Such a well-respected and honoured group as the British Columbia Council of Forest Industries—I say it is well-respected, certainly, in government and Liberal party circles—says in a telex sent both to the Canadian Pacific and to the CNR that, whereas the CN used to distribute boxcars for the lumber industry on the basis of 40 per cent to mills on the CN line and 60 per cent to mill sites on the B.C. Rail line through the connection at Prince George, the distribution of cars on that basis has been discontinued. As I say, this is forcing people to bring lumber into Prince George. Mr. Speaker, there are 400 million feet of lumber sitting on the ground. Right away there is a need for 4,000 boxcars to move it out to shipping points.

Let us talk in terms of the loss of money to the area. Lumber mill operators have lost millions of potential dollars because they cannot get the lumber out to shipping