

*National Transportation Hearings*

I know that the CTC is now studying this aspect which can become quite costly for the citizen, and that it is looking for ways of reducing this burden which an individual, a citizen's group must bear, to allow them to resort with more fairness to the procedures established by these commissions, either the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission or the Canadian Transport Commission.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard valid arguments for both sides of this issue, one being that the commission must have the right to review, rescind, change, alter or vary its orders and decisions, the other being that the power of the Canadian Transport Commission to do so should be restricted, so that justice is not constantly doing and undoing itself. My colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Anderson) argued that the CTC's mandate, its power of review, should be as widespread as possible in order to avoid that citizens, groups, or areas be wronged when a decision that is issued is detrimental to them.

Moreover, my colleague the hon. member for Windsor-Walkerville, seconded by the hon. member for Scarborough West (Mr. Martin) and the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar (Mr. Hnatyshyn), argued that the power now enjoyed by the commission to change its decisions and modify its orders is too wide, as I said earlier, and that any transport company can, for more or less serious reasons, try to convince the commission to change a decision it has made and which might not be advantageous for the company.

These are the two arguments we must consider and I think they can be applied to both sides of the fence. The hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar said it is unjust to allow large transport companies to refer constantly to the commission's decisions, but on the other hand the magnitude of the Canadian Transport Commission's power to change or review its own decisions makes it possible for simple citizens, citizen groups, local chambers of commerce or any other pressure group, in other words for people who do not have the financial means and are not as well organized as large companies, to refer to the commission's decisions. Arguments are used on both sides with equal force, and this is the dilemma I am facing now.

I would like to come back a little later on the foundation of the question, but may I digress a little, Mr. Speaker, to comment on what the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar said when he stressed a real problem in the western provinces, namely the fact that provincial authorities or the citizens or local groups feel somewhat uncomfortable when it comes to appeal to the Canadian Transport Commission, and they consider that the commission does not always do justice to their regional aspirations.

This is an important matter which the hon. member raised, but I would like to remind him that last year, on December 3, if my memory serves me right, in a speech he made in Saskatchewan, the Minister of Transport undertook, on behalf

[Mr. Lapointe.]

of the government, to establish as far as possible a western arm of the CTC, as he said to look after and satisfy more adequately the legitimate regional expectations of the western provinces. So I am happy the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar raised that aspect of the problem but I would remind him, Mr. Speaker, that such a commitment was made by the Minister of Transport nearly a year ago now.

The hon. member for Carleton-Charlotte (Mr. McCain) wanted to support the principle of the bill we are considering now on the ground that it would be a good opportunity to discuss the whole policy and problem of transport at a meeting of the transport committee. I have some sympathy for the point he has made because everybody in this House had at some time or other problems somehow related to transport in Canada. And that is all the more true, I believe, for the Atlantic provinces and for the riding of Carleton-Charlotte which is represented by the hon. member. Of course, as individual members in this House we all had to criticize decisions made by representatives of our national railways but naturally it is always important, I think, to raise those matters before the House of Commons or in committee to try bringing those large companies to play a social role which should be more important. With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to illustrate my point with a personal experience I had some two years ago when the Canadian National decided to suspend its passenger service between Quebec and La Malbaie in the heart of my riding.

Of course, you could argue that there had been a sharp decline in the volume of passengers in recent years, but as was mentioned by the hon. member for Carleton-Charlotte, there was no way to assess or determine to what extent the company was responsible for that traffic loss. So it is very easy, Mr. Speaker, to come up after a few years and say: Look, the number of passengers has been going down for five years, we are losing millions of dollars each year on that branch; that's why we are asking the Canadian Transport Commission permission to suppress that service. That is very easy to do: you only have to make trains leave at 5.15 a.m., or use self-propelling railway coaches without any heating; there are all kinds of means which may be used to scare the passengers away.

That is what they said in the riding of Charlevoix when the commission was under the able and noble chairmanship of the vice president, Mr. Roberge, who came in La Malbaie to preside over the public hearings. Mr. Roberge was very sympathetic to our local representations but, of course, he was faced with questions of dollars, statistics that could not be denied because if the company said, we had so many passengers such and such a week, this could not be denied, it was right. And the commission or the commissioner did not have any means at their disposal to assess, as I was saying, the factors for which the company itself might have been responsible, the factors which brought about that deficit situation, so finally, not