

on the prairies. The railway companies have said since that at least until 1975 they will not be asking for any more than a maximum of 1,800 miles of abandonment. So let us not agree to the abandoning of a given line when in fact that line might become a very economic line in the years ahead.

I want to say that the present legislation, as I read it, is a substantial improvement over the first draft, and that the Canadian Transportation Commission has a good deal of discretion in recommending whether or not an uneconomic line should be maintained, and if so, suggesting a certain monetary compensation to the railway companies; but I know of no consideration that has been given to compensating farmers themselves when a line is abandoned.

Now, no doubt there will be lots of applications for abandonment of lines. The railways will be doing everything they can to abandon the lines which are not now protected. I can understand their point of view very well. They are going to get the grain anyway. If a farmer has to haul another 20, 30, or 40 miles, the railway companies will get the grain, and under the Crownsnest Pass Agreement they will be paid almost precisely the same amount, so it is to their advantage to obtain abandonment. But is it to the advantage of the farmers?

I know one part of a branch line some 50 miles in length that the railways are endeavouring to abandon. In each of three towns there is a brand new elevator, or less than two or three years old; so modern facilities are available. The three elevators have been handling during the past year over 1,000,000 bushels of grain. To haul that quantity out requires 22 miles of railway from the three points. It is so easy to say, "Let's go modern; let large elevators in the main lines." Well, the railways informed the transport committee that they would like to have a marketing point every 50 miles. To haul this greater distance, a farmer must incur a substantial expense. A small freight train today carrying grain has fifty cars, and to carry the wheat that goes into those fifty 2,000-bushel cars would take 500 farmers driving 500 trucks, each one carrying a load of 200 bushels of wheat. I ask you, which is the more efficient, a railway train with four or five people operating it, or 500 farmers driving trucks at their own expense because the railway lines have been abandoned? This is modernization in reverse. Where railway lines are abandoned, it will mean a transfer of money

from the farmers' pockets to the automobile manufacturers, truck manufacturers, oil companies and so on.

I am not saying there should be no branch line abandonment. This is a problem which must be dealt with. However, it should be dealt with with great caution. I am saying that we should not automatically decide that, because a branch line loses some money it should be taken out. The railway may be the only small industry in that area. It may have in that elevator a good modern seed-cleaning plant, which is something which should be considered.

I realize that the Transport Commission will have power to make that recommendation. I am merely saying that I hope it will be given the greatest possible amount of weight.

I would suggest that in handling this whole affair there is need for a united voice from the Prairie provinces. I suggest that at present, at least on this problem, the farm organizations are weak, divided, and not very articulate. The Canadian Federation of Agriculture did not even grace the Transport Commission hearing with a submission. It did not appear. The Wheat Pools appeared, the Farmers' Union appeared, but their submissions were not the strong submissions that the situation required.

In the interest of getting the best possible results from this legislation—not to destroy it or undermine it but to get the very best possible results—the people in the Prairie Provinces should be united on this problem in one organization representing the farm organizations of the three provincial governments, so that when representation is made to the new commission it will be made with a strong voice.

Furthermore, some consideration should be given to providing moneys to the producers themselves for losses in any phasing-out period. I believe it is just, it is fair and it is in keeping with the Government and Parliament's attitude to other industries and other areas faced with somewhat similar problems.

The federal Government should also take the initiative in providing legal counsel and competent experts on freight rates and freight questions, to help put the case for those areas affected by proposed branch line abandonment. This would mean a kind of ombudsman, enlisted to argue the economic and other legitimate interests of those who may be affected.

Let us assume and let us hope that this commission will be the best in the world.