

Branch Railway Lines

reasonable. The railways have complained that they have been losing their shirts on passenger service, and most of us believe them. Evidence to this effect was offered to the commission and the commission came forward and said it was the fact.

What has happened in the last two years as far as passenger service is concerned? We have all heard of the red, white and blue fares and the tremendous increase in traffic. Mr. Gordon said just a few months ago that it is too early to tell, but certainly things look better than ever. In other words, the railways modernized their marketing, streamlined their passenger operations and now things look as though they are beginning to improve; yet we are starting to give them a big subsidy in connection with passenger changes. I suggest there is something of a paradox here. Surely one does not set out to subsidize so definitive a service that is in a flux or change, and where there is some indication that with even more marketing and with a move back to a use of the rails this passenger service in many parts of the country may be able to fend for itself. Yet that is what this government seems to be doing with this legislation.

Mr. Chairman, there is one other aspect of the minister's approach, or lack of approach, or at least his lack in telling us what his approach is, which I should like to mention. I am sure he has an approach. We all know him too well to feel that he does not have this pretty well set in that very capable mind of his. There is nothing in this legislation in respect of one of the major problems of concern to the people who work for the railroads, or whose communities are sustained economically by the railways. I thought this was supposed to be such a go-ahead government made up of a group of very bright people who were sensitive to all the things that were happening and all the trends, but everyone has been talking about automation lately, the effects of it, and automatic innovation and change. We had a committee which met last year which voted almost unanimously—there was one dissenting vote—in favour of changing the Railway Act. The committee made quite clear recommendations in respect of a change to take care of that community of employees who were being shifted; but all the minister does is stand in his place and tell us that the railways are a very important part of the economy of this country, and that they employ a great number of people. He has no message in this resolution in respect of those

very genuine problems which exist in this field.

It might be said that this problem should be dealt with by amendments to the Railway Act; but this is something the minister did not explain, or if he did I did not understand him. What is the relationship of this legislation to the Railway Act? It seems to me to be very lacking in general terms. It may be more explicit in the bill when it is presented, but there is either going to be a conflict or a great need for amending that act as a result of this legislation. We have received no information in that regard. In other words the minister has come forward in this house without any grand outline of intention, presenting a bill which he is willing to concede will affect a tremendous number of Canadians, but is unwilling to give us a clear statement of his intention, or a clear statement in respect of government policy. It seems to me the only excuse or alibi that can be put forward for him, and he must be clear in his mind in this regard—and surely must have worked out the situation—is that he does not want to become involved in any grand hassle on principle which might lead us into longer and longer debate.

I would suggest that if we had a little bit less stupidity on the part of the government in its tactics in this house we would not be reaching the stage of bringing a bill of this complexity in at this late date, having only ten days, which I think represents a good undertaking, to look at this bill, then send it to a committee where there will be all kinds of people who want to make representations. The minister knows that it will be a miracle if this bill gets through at this session, unless this session is going to last into next year.

What were we doing during the last three or four months, at a time when this particular resolution could have been before us? We were fooling around with interim supply and the flag debate. This was the grand strategy of those masters on that side of the house whom we just had to have back in Ottawa in order to get the country straightened out. What a collection they are, Mr. Chairman, indeed. We are now faced with a most complex resolution brought in late in the session. I suppose we will have the minister chattering away on the C.B.C. television some night in the not too distant future telling the people about the opposition blocking and getting in the way of the government in this connection.

An hon. Member: Perhaps he has learned.