

Provision of Moneys to CNR and Air Canada

possible to run a railway profitably if passengers cannot use it? It is impossible because train schedules are simply inadequate.

Mr. Speaker, I will quote as an example the service between Quebec and Ottawa. I travel by car between these two cities simply because I can make the trip in four hours whereas it would take seven or eight hours by train. However I would prefer the latter means of transportation as it is more restful.

People will not take the train if the service is not adequate. Yet, television, newspapers and radio pour out endless advertising praising the CNR's red, white or blue rates, but what is the use of these reduced rates if there are no trains?

This is one of the reasons why we are studying this request to provide funds for the CNR, the only result of which will be to increase the contribution of the taxpayers in order to line the pockets of the shareholders.

It is almost ridiculous that the two railway companies should announce that they will abandon uneconomic passenger services. One should think that if it is a question of making an essential service profitable the best thing would be to get the taxpayers to use it.

The bus service between Montreal and Quebec City runs every hour. Buses from Montréal are packed especially when some demonstrations draw 10,000 or 15,000 people to Quebec's capital. Buses are widely used. Even when they are packed, nobody complains.

Bus companies do not ask us to make up their deficits. They do not request each year a grant of \$15 or \$20 million. Why? Because they can adjust to the market and convince people to travel by bus.

What can we say, however, when there is only one train running from one community to another, and that same train leaves the station at an ungodly hour. If there were, for instance, three trains leaving Quebec for Ottawa each day and you can be sure that they would be packed. The companies would succeed thus in making up for some deficits. Indeed, one can read at page 8 of the report established by the CNR's auditors for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 1968, and I quote:

Freight revenue increased during the year by 4.5 per cent, but passenger revenue declined by 15.8 per cent—

This quotation ends like this:

—from the 1967 record level.

[Mr. Matte.]

It is extremely important to note this. During 1967, the year of the Centennial and of Expo, 54 million people came to Montreal. It was a record year. At that time, trains were more packed than usual. If you take this as a basis to say that there was a decrease of 15.8 per cent, this is altering the facts. If the CNR and the CPR rely on this to argue that the service shows a deficit in 1968 these statements are inaccurate. It was exceptional that in 1967 so many people flocked to Montreal and, obviously, a decrease was to be expected in 1968.

Starting from this fact, therefore, we may contend that if it has been possible to give an adequate service to passengers during 1967, this means that if the companies were less concerned with profit-earning capacity and more with the quality of service, they could convince more people to travel by train. I suggest, these are very important points, and I should like to take this opportunity to point out a few things that are of particular interest to me, since I am unable to visit my whole riding by car, I have to take the train when I want to get to the northern part, because it is the only possible means of transportation.

Now, the Quebec-Abitibi line is to be abandoned.

I wish to point out that when the only means of transportation available in a region is the train, it should not be abandoned. This proves once more that no serious study had been done when it was considered to discontinue this service. This is then a joint offensive by the CNR and the CPR to force our hand. In effect, it has been said that if the passenger service were abolished, the citizens will make a fuss about it of course and, consequently, the government is simply going to pay and this what the companies are waiting for.

This is how the management of these companies think and we want to condemn them here. It is absolutely necessary to make these officials think straight. We are blamed constantly for suggesting a solution but if it were applied, we would not be faced with such a problem.

● (9:30 p.m.)

The companies' deficits are mainly the result of loans and the exorbitant interest charges paid on these loans. The question of deficits would not even exist if this loan problem were settled at the source when essential public services are involved.