

Oral Questions

● (1415)

POSITIONING OF CARS CONTAINING DANGEROUS GOODS

Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley-Hants): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for that part of his report. Could he assure the House that under existing regulations proper safety inspection procedures were carried out on the wheel which broke, at its last stop, which I presume was in Toronto? In reference to his answer wherein he talked about the hydro-fluoric car buried in a jumble of cars, could he assure the House that in future regulations the positioning of cars containing dangerous goods will be addressed in relation to recent American studies which assert that such cars should be at the rear of trains, not in the middle of trains, even though there may be a buffer zone in the middle of trains?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, as usual there are different views on the subject. I understand that there is a United States report to the effect that cars containing dangerous goods should be in the last part of trains. Justice Grange suggested that they should be in the first part of trains, and the practice now is to put them in the middle of trains. I say this without smiling, just to indicate that there are different views on subjects of this kind.

Partly because of the work done by the Grange commission following Mississauga, the response system in this particular instance worked very well indeed. For example, Canutech, which is the federal emergency centre, was contacted and provided information on the dangerous goods which were involved. The Ontario Provincial Police Emergency Centre in Toronto was very efficient in its handling of the situation. A CTC commissioner was on the scene very early. The expertise of chemical companies was available very early as well. The cars had been properly spaced, dangerous goods had been properly identified, and the manifest was available very early. There are some of the good effects of the Grange report.

With respect to emergency response, we have made tremendous progress. Unfortunately accidents still happen, but at least we cope with them better than we did before the incident at Mississauga took place.

SAFETY INSPECTION PROCEDURES

Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley-Hants): Madam Speaker, I have a short supplementary question. I appreciate that there is a difference of opinion, but my question was twofold. First, could the minister assure the House that proper inspection procedures were carried out at Toronto on the wheel? Second, what study would MOT or CTC instigate to resolve the difference of opinion as to the positioning of cars carrying dangerous goods?

The CTC press release of September 30, 1981, after the show-cause hearing, indicated that safety initiatives will not appreciably affect the competitive position of railways, will not require additional public funds, and will not create an undue increase in charges to the public. In other words, CTC indicated that safety procedures will not affect the financial load of railways, the public purse or charges to the public.

I agree with the minister that there has been a lot of work on safety initiatives, but what will he do to accelerate them? Will safety be part of the mandate, rather than these three other factors, so that some of the safety recommendations which have now been discussed for almost two years will be implemented?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, there was a hearing before the CTC on that particular subject. Indications were pretty clear in the recommendations of the CTC that there was a change of orientation, a change of approach in our society. The economic preoccupation is still considered to be of major importance. Nevertheless, the CTC has made recommendations and will make other regulations concerning, for example, hot box detectors, the type of equipment, the shields, the couplers and what not, which obviously will add to the operational cost of the railways. The CTC has tried to maintain a proper balance in this matter, and as everyone across the country has told me, we have to keep a proper balance of preoccupations between safety and economic activity. That is the balancing act that is necessary.

● (1420)

If I may continue, Madam Speaker, on this subject of whether or not there was an inspection of this equipment, because it is rather important, I questioned the CTC this morning who informed me that the CTC had no reason not to believe proper inspection was carried out. By way of an answer, the CTC outlined the different inspections a boxcar, or a tank car has to go through. It has to be inspected during and after manufacture and at intervals during its lifetime.

Mr. Nowlan: But was it?

Mr. Pepin: Yes, it was. At least, there is no reason to believe it was not is the answer I received. Each time a tank car is filled, it is inspected by the manufacturer, and the shipper before and on completion of loading. The railway itself has a mechanical inspection at every marshalling yard throughout a journey. A superficial inspection is carried out when two trains meet. When the consignee receives the tank car and unloads it he also does an inspection. I am told that this time it was an accident.

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RIDLEY ISLAND TERMINAL, B.C.—CONTRACT ISSUED TO
JAPANESE FIRM

Mr. J. R. Ellis (Prince Edward-Hastings): Madam Speaker, I have a couple of questions for the Minister of Transport. For much of last week the minister was in British Columbia. He will be aware that the second stacker-reclaimer built by Stephens-Adamson for Westshore Terminals begins operation