

*Branch Railway Lines*

revenue were passed on to the taxpayer, was coming to an end. They met in an attempt to find some common ground so that they could come together on an economic front. To the credit of all concerned, both on the side of the railways and on the side of the grain companies, pool, co-operative and private, an understanding was reached. I think generally speaking this understanding has been followed, although there have been times when I wondered if the understanding was being kept fully. I know there have been some complaints on the part of each side about the actions of each other, but generally speaking that understanding has been honoured.

On two or three occasions the predecessor of the present minister has stood in this house and said the present government would honour those commitments. One of those commitments was that we would introduce legislation and get it under way in the spring of 1963. The government changed in April of that year, and of course we could not honour that commitment. We in the opposition have not been too hard on the present government for not bringing this legislation forward sooner, because, while we knew it was ready, we knew that the new government would have to spend a good many months examining it in order to get the feeling of it and decide whether they wanted to bring it before the house. The resolution now on the order paper is almost identical to the one we prepared, with the exception of one clause, and I am sure the present minister is aware of that fact. I point this fact out because we have now reached that stage at which we have not been able to honour a commitment of time. I should like to point out that we did not expect this government to move too quickly because, as the minister has said, this is very complicated legislation.

Having described that meeting between the economic groups affected by the actual operation of the railways, particularly in western Canada, we called a meeting at the end of January, 1963 of the three prairie premiers and the officials here in Ottawa. I hope the minister has read the minutes of that meeting, at which we explained the general philosophy of the government in respect of solving the railway situation. We explained in general terms the devices we had developed to protect public interests, and we asked for their co-operation, because there were certain fields the board of transport commissioners could not cope with. We admitted this fact, and indicated that only by co-operation between the respective governments, namely the federal

government and the governments of the three prairie provinces, could there be an answer to the difficulties.

Mr. Chairman, I think it is a well known fact that the great bulk of low density line abandonments recommended exist in the prairie provinces, and you will see why the remarks I make now deal specifically with that area, but apply equally to every section of the country where line abandonment is contemplated. At this meeting of the prairie premiers we outlined certain commitments, one being that during the period of the introduction of the bill, first and second readings, there would be delays enabling the representatives of those governments to prepare general briefs outlining their positions. Whatever information those general briefs contain, they are ready and have been ready for many months. We also indicated to the premiers that in respect of this question of rationalization, even though at that moment we did not contemplate such an agency or board as suggested by the minister, a fund was available and we would work very closely with them in this regard.

I should like to make one further suggestion at this time, and I hope I am being constructive. I think the three premiers agreed to the suggestion that we did not generally support the concept of an over-all study of the prairie area, but that we thought it should be broken down into regions. Manitoba lends itself very well to four main regions; Saskatchewan lends itself to nine or ten and Alberta to four or five. We thought this study could proceed while consideration was being given to the nationalized abandonment period recommended by the commission.

I think the government should also be aware of one further question which was kept separate during this meeting. We also agreed that when the truckers saw the legislation they would be given time to prepare a brief and either present it at the time of second reading or in committee. We made that pledge and I know the government will honour it, because they should.

Time is passing and I want to deal with the subject matter of the report. As I said earlier, the first principle of the report and its highlights, I think, is the recommendation of the commissioners that at long last there should be an end to unequal freight rate increases in Canada which have so plagued and divided our country economically over the last 30 years. Second, they recommend that the railways should be allowed to move out of passenger services where people did not