

Canadian National Railways

I do not look forward within the next month or few months to being in the position where I stand in this House, point my finger across at the Minister of Transport and say, "I told you so." But I very much fear that if this bus service is continued during the winter months regardless of weather conditions, we in Newfoundland will be faced with a tragedy and somebody will have to answer to the Newfoundland people, bearing in mind that during 70 years of operation by the Newfoundland Railway, and later Canadian National, they never lost a passenger. So far the bus service has not lost a passenger, but this is by sheer, absolute luck.

When we raise our voices about this matter to our own Newfoundland minister he accuses us of being antiquated. I forget his exact reference, but he said we were back in the days of Noah and very glibly and blandly referred to the ark. He said we were advocating the retention of an antiquated train service. We were not supporting the retention of an antiquated train service; we were suggesting that the service be upgraded. The minister told us that we were out of step with progress. The photographs and the news stories I have here—is that the progress we are supposed to accept? If this is progress, then somebody has his wires crossed and I suggest it is the minister. We do not have any objection to a bus service. Of course we want a bus service. But when it is the only means of public transportation for a 550-mile journey across our province, we say that although it may do a fine job in the summer, during winter it is extremely perilous, and if continued will end in tragedy.

Just a few days ago on January 29 we received a report from the Canadian Transport Commission. This one is signed by Mr. Pickersgill himself, Jolly Jack. He did not sign a similar order agreeing to the discontinuance of our passenger service, but he did sign this one. It concerned an application from Canadian Pacific to discontinue "The Canadian". In the report appears this line "...that this historic service could not be abruptly discontinued." They turned down this application, Mr. Speaker. "The Canadian" is a historic train. They said they could not think of its being discontinued summarily or abruptly; that would not be good enough. I ask, what about the historic trains in Newfoundland that served the people so well? Canadian National have provided a bus service that will kill half the people of Newfoundland if they ever use it. That proposal is just nonsense.

● (9:30 p.m.)

Since the bus system was instituted it has become apparent that Canadian National have allowed railbeds to deteriorate in Newfoundland. That is pretty well recognized. I cannot quote all the instances of derailment of freight trains during the last year or so. Recently I personally have seen more freight cars and the merchandise they contain strewn over the Newfoundland countryside than I have ever seen in my life. It seems that the attitude has been something like this: Well, passengers are not using the service anymore; we need only worry about five, six or seven trainmen or enginemen.

[Mr. Peddle.]

There does not seem to be very much regard for their lives. I have clippings before me from last year's newspapers. One says that four 175-ton CN diesels were derailed two miles east of Deer Lake. Another asks, "Is this a parking lot?" It says that four tank cars were strewn across the railway tracks and that 300 feet of rail were torn up. Another says there was a large derailment near Corner Brook. The local St. John's newspaper has taken the cry up in an editorial. Since the editorial sums up what ought to be said, I shall read it in its entirety:

Last week the CNR had a bad derailment near Deer Lake with 11 cars, including four diesels, going off the tracks. As things go at the railway, this was not an unusual item of news, for derailments are fairly common with the CNR in Newfoundland. What was different about this accident was that it came so soon after the change in the method of maintaining the tracks.

In January, the railway announced that it was laying off 67 sectionmen in favor of a new mechanical system of doing their work. The sectionmen were employed on the old method of a detailed and constant survey of the track, using speeders to cover the part of the track assigned to them. The men were available at all hours of the night and day and during or after a storm they would be out on the line making sure that everything was in order for the trains coming through.

In many ways the sectionmen were the unsung heroes of the railway, for with them lay the responsibility of keeping the track up to safe standards, regardless of weather or time. But now the railway has turned to a new system which puts track maintenance on a more centralized, directed process, using special closed and comfortable maintenance cars to move the work gang to the areas needing repairs.

This may be in keeping with modern technology but as far as things like track maintenance are concerned, it is hard to beat the devotion and individual attention of the totally involved workers such as the sectionmen were reputed to be.

The run-off near Deer Lake will probably cost the CNR over \$250,000 in parts, repair work and time lost by the diesels, an amount which would have paid a lot of work hours for the sectionmen. It will also help to reinforce mainland opinion that it is not economically possible to run a railway in this province. And that kind of thinking may lead to the abandonment of the entire system.

The CNR is a Crown corporation and gets a lot of its money from the public purse. In accidents of this kind the enquiry should be public. The railway may not always be as lucky with its accidents; another accident of this kind may lead to the deaths of the engine gang. That is why it is essential that the public have the full assurance that everything is being done to maintain the tracks in a safe condition. A public enquiry into accidents is one way to see that this is being done.

It is useless asking for a public inquiry. We have asked for it and have been told, "Yes, it is coming." My colleague for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) has already referred to the ferry service between North Sydney and Port aux Basques and I see no purpose in repeating what he said so well. I should, however, like to mention the CN coastal service which serves the Labrador coast and parts of my riding. Just before Christmas a CN coastal vessel loaded with 300 tons of supplies for the Goose Bay area became blocked in ice that was not anticipated, and had to return without delivering the merchandise.

I maintained then, and I still maintain, that although Canadian National might not have been under a legal obligation to deliver the goods, it ought to have assumed its moral obligation in the same way Air Canada accepts