

*Railway Mail Service*

Mr. C. WALLACE STEWART (Humboldt): The matter which the hon. member for Dauphin (Mr. Ward) has drawn to the attention of the House through this resolution this afternoon was first brought to the attention of most of the members of this House, I think, through a statement, made before the committee that dealt with national railways and shipping last year, by an official of the Canadian National Railways who appeared before that committee, and although he did not use the term "discrimination" which the hon. member uses in his resolution, he left on our minds the impression that there was a discrimination by the Post Office Department in the allotment of mails to the Canadian National Railways, in comparison with the allotment of mail which the Canadian Pacific Railway carried over their lines. That committee to which I have referred, of which I had the honour of being a member, made a certain investigation of this matter last year. I must admit that the investigation was very casual. We did not go into the subject at any great length, but taking the statement that had been submitted to us by the official of the National Railways as being generally correct, we did make a recommendation to this House, and I should like to read to the House the recommendation made in the report of the committee on National Railways and Shipping last year, which is as follows:

In regard to the transport of His Majesty's mails, the evidence submitted indicates that there is at present an unequal distribution of mail services between the railways—in some instances resulting in inferior service to the public. Your committee feels that adequate mail service is of paramount importance in the public interest, and suggests that the government take steps to review the whole question of the transport of mails throughout Canada in order that distribution may be effected to give a maximum of service to the public and justice to the Canadian National Railways.

Hon. members will note that in that paragraph of the report there is no statement that we had found there was a discrimination, but without affecting the service to the public which our Post Office Department renders, and which it has been formed and built up to render, it appeared to us that it would be possible to change the routing of some of the mails in such a way that it would perhaps render greater justice to the Canadian National Railways. The official who appeared before our committee summarized the claims, if I may use that term, that the Canadian National Railways had upon the Post Office Department for a further allotment of mails to be carried. He put it under four heads. The first claim was

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that they should have carriage of mail on their trains, Nos. 1 and 2, from Montreal to Vancouver, which was carried by the Canadian Pacific Railway. The second claim was that they should similarly carry on their trains Nos. 3 and 4 between Toronto and Winnipeg the through mails which are now allotted to the Canadian Pacific Railway. The third claim was that all overseas mail, ex steamers at Quebec should be handed to the Canadian National Railways for transport to Montreal, and his final claim was that all overflow mail originating in Montreal and destined for Toronto should be carried by the Canadian National Railways. He gave us to understand that the existing condition was that they carried that overflow three days a week, and the Canadian Pacific Railway carried it three days a week.

As I have already stated this matter was not very thoroughly investigated last year by the committee. The House will remember that that committee met in the closing days of the session, and there was no time, even if the committee had seen fit to go into the question at length, and perhaps to the depth, that the question merited. I have, however, in the interval been making further inquiries. It seemed to me that this was one of the matters in which perhaps we could take a definite stand in regard to placing our Canadian National Railways on a little better footing. I want to make it very clear to the House that in making the investigation, and in making the statement that I make this afternoon, I put it on this ground, that we, as representing the taxpayers of this country, who have to meet the deficits of our Canadian National Railways, are not doing our duty if we should overlook any point where we can turn business to the Canadian National railways. I know that someone might raise the objection at this point that by asking the Post Office Department to divert its mails to the Canadian National Railways it may not only put the public of Canada at a disadvantage in regard to service, but it would only be taking money out of one pocket and putting it into another. I am not sure that that last argument could be sustained. We certainly do not want to put the public of Canada to any disadvantage in so far as service is concerned. I would lay down as a basic principle that in the matter of the routing of mail the Post Office Department must always have a perfectly free hand to send the mails over the route that will take them to their destination in the shortest time and in the most economical manner that is possible. But on the other hand, where it is possible for