

The Address—Mr. Benjamin

Almost none of the recommendations of the Rail Passenger Action Force or the task force report of the Progressive Conservative Party on rail passenger service have been implemented and the Government has been in power for two years. All of the ills which the former Minister of Transport, the Member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski), and myself have been pointing out repeatedly every year since 1976 are still there.

No self-respecting businessman or self-respecting Government would start up a business operated with old, worn out, written-off equipment. If you were to ask a bank manager for a start-up loan for such a business he would laugh you out of the store. That is exactly what happened to VIA Rail in 1976. It got stuck for \$80 million for old equipment owned by CN and CP.

The Rail Passenger Action Force was chaired by Dr. Hugh Horner; you could hardly call him a raving socialist. That task force could not understand why the taxpayers of Canada who already owned that CNR equipment had to pay for it a second time. They say the same thing about station facilities and other facilities. They could not understand why the people of Canada had to pay a second time for something they already owned. If that is the sound business practice of which the Conservatives talk, no wonder the country is going to hell in a handbasket. For two years the Government has failed to put a stop to that nonsense. The Government should be requiring Canadian National and Canadian Pacific to refund the money that the taxpayers paid for the second time for that equipment and for station facilities.

The only alternative to re-equipping VIA Rail, as recommended by the action task force, is to close down the entire system outside the Quebec-Windsor corridor. We still do not have the new locomotives on stream. The orders for the new railway cars have not yet been placed in spite of announcements annually since 1976 of the purchase of new railway passenger cars. All the Minister could say in response to me yesterday was that he hoped to have a chance to make an announcement like his predecessors. That is not good enough. It remains designed to fail. If the Government wants to have, as it says it does, a rail passenger system worthy of the name, it will have to put some money where its mouth is and it will have to make something of it so that people will use it.

Mr. Malone: Mr. Speaker, I would like to have the opportunity to comment and ask questions on many parts of the Hon. Member's speech, but I particularly want to focus on those comments the Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin) made early in his address which are of concern to anyone whose constituency reflects the prairie grain industry. In particular, I share the concern he has about the grain handling capacity at our ports. I will ask only three questions in order that I do not take more than my share of the time.

Does the Hon. Member subscribe to the view that there ought to be some third party liability in conjunction with labour union strikes? Would he favour a system of declaring

the movement of grain, bearing in mind its importance to our national economy, an essential service? Does he subscribe to the view that in the areas where there are farmer-owned co-ops the farmers should be able to handle the grain during strike periods and be their own handlers? I would find it helpful if the Hon. Member could respond to those three questions.

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what the hon. gentleman is talking about when he talks of third party liability. I just do not know what he wants to know. I would be happy if he would elaborate on that question. I do not understand the purport of his question with regard to grain movement.

• (1250)

The Hon. Member asked about the movement of grain being an essential service. The same thing can be said about a host of other goods and services in Canada such as railroads, the post office and airlines, or lumber and forest products. All are services to the public and the nation, and are essential services. However, one must allow the collective bargaining process to proceed. When it breaks down and fails then it is the responsibility of the Government of the day and all political parties to come to a conclusion as to whether or not it requires government and parliamentary intervention. That intervention should always be used only as a last resort.

We cannot simply pick out the movement of grain as an essential service because one can make up a list as long as one's arm about what are essential services. If that principle is applied in law, then the collective bargaining process is negated, along with the rights of employers and employees in most if not all of the workforce in Canada that works under a collective agreement. It would apply to all municipal, provincial and federal employees. Where would it stop? What is considered an essential service?

I can understand taking such action in a war situation, but otherwise it seems to me that each case must be judged on its own merits. If the collective bargaining process completely breaks down and all resources of the Government have been exhausted, of course, any responsible Government of any political party will have to move in and declare that sector an essential service for the good and welfare of Canada. However, this cannot be done ahead of time.

As far as farmers handling their own grain is concerned, first I want to say to my hon. friend that they have enough trouble handling their own grain on their own farms. They are having enough trouble harvesting it. I have read news reports of farmers from Alberta who wanted to go to Thunder Bay and operate the grain terminal. I found that strange, because hardly a bushel of Alberta grain goes to Thunder Bay anyway. I thought it was just posturing of the dumbest kind. Furthermore, of all my good farmer friends, who are my friends, I do not know of one who knows what to do or how to work in a grain terminal in Thunder Bay, Vancouver or anywhere else. It is a dirty job and requires different capabilities than what it takes to take off the crop and put it in the granary.