

Provision of Moneys to CNR and Air Canada

● (9:20 p.m.)

One of the major repair facilities of the CNR has always been located in the city of Transcona, actually a suburb of Winnipeg. This area forms part of the constituency of the hon. member for St. Boniface (Mr. Guay), a Liberal member of this House. The secretary of one of the local unions which has members who work in Transcona wrote me several days ago and said:

The matter of the transfer of work from Transcona to Montreal is a little more complex. It is beginning to look like Air Canada all over again. With the financial shares of Air Canada wholly owned by the CNR it begins to look like Air Canada may not have been entirely responsible for their own folly. Some organization or somebody seems determined to concentrate federal government owned companies in Quebec to the detriment of the rest of Canada. When two large federally owned companies are pulled out of western Canada it ceases to be strictly a company affair and becomes a political one also.

Those are the views of the secretary of that union. I hate to think he is right. Let me deal with the specifics of this case by quoting further from his letter:

To date 30 of the smaller type diesels have been sent east. We have received 22 of the larger diesels in return. These larger diesels are unserviceable in Transcona due to their size. Now the CNR has decided that when the warranty is finished on these larger diesels they will be returned to eastern Canada and other diesels still under warranty will be sent to western Canada.

At the beginning of 1968 the CNR had scheduled 16 diesels per month to have major overhauls in Transcona. They are now doing only 6 per month and this is to be further reduced next year. The CNR claim they are going to put an addition on to the motive power shop in Transcona in order to repair the new large diesels. The trouble is they have delayed this construction for two years already and it is not in the 1970 budget.

The CNR is proposing to lay off between 150 and 200 personnel in the equipment department across the whole railway system with about 80 at Transcona alone at the beginning of the new year.

The people of Winnipeg have in my opinion been treated badly and have a valid complaint about the way Air Canada has acted. I hope the treatment they receive from the CNR in future is not the same as that which they received from Air Canada. I have raised this matter with the president of the CNR, who has assured me that it intends to expand the facilities at Transcona and that the work force will be maintained there. He confirmed in his letter a charge made by the secretary of the local union in the letter from which I just quoted. So far this situation remains to be dealt with in the future.

The CNR workers at Transcona see work which was traditionally done at Winnipeg being done at Montreal. They see employees with long service in Winnipeg being laid off and, I presume, the work force in Montreal being increased. They, and I agree with them, consider this to be unfair. They believe this government is not interested in western Canada. They believe the government places a low priority on western Canada and its interests, and is more interested in central Canada. We do not want any special concessions for western Canada, but we do believe that as citizens of Canada we are entitled to the same opportunities and considerations from the federal government as other regions of Canada. We do not want to see work which has always been done in Winnipeg moved to another area.

I urge the officials of the CNR to heed the representations, not only of myself but of many people from Winnipeg, to make sure the traditionally important role played by the CNR in Winnipeg will continue.

[Translation]

Mr. René Matte (Champlain): Mr. Speaker, the fact that the debate on this bill is lasting since several days indicates that the alarm has sounded throughout the country insofar as the decisions of Canadian railway companies are concerned.

It would be extremely unfortunate if once more the points raised by the various opposition parties, and even by some government supporters, were not taken into consideration.

The hon. member for Trois-Rivières (Mr. Mongrain) joined us a moment ago to object to the decisions which both the CNR and the CPR are about to take.

For instance, if Air Canada cease their operations at Trois-Rivières, this will be a form of injustice and it will contribute to lowering the level of comfort and quality of services in Canada.

It is quite abnormal that we have to discuss the possibility of abolishing such important and essential services as those of the Canadian National Railways or of Air Canada. Efforts should be made instead to find out why these companies are operating at a deficit.

Mr. Speaker, I think I have found the answer. In my opinion, they operate in the red because their service is awful. How is it