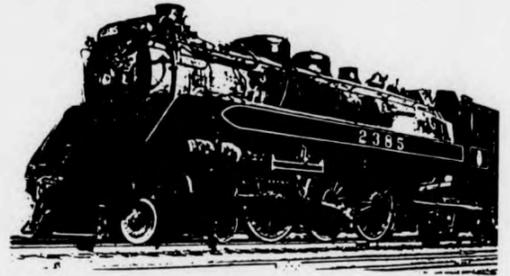


# ng or bust: on the rails



icy. Cochrane depends on the rail as an affordable, regular means of transportation. "The Rail gives us life. Bouchard didn't build the railroad, we did and we want it back. And we will take it back."

The crowd, mainly railway union types, was pretty worked up over the speeches and became extremely sentimental with the music. After a grand finale of "Will the Circle Be Unbroken," with over 25 people on stage playing every available instrument (even the spoons), the Legion was the hardest place to leave. It was more than a hootenanny, it was close to a spiritual experience. It was very heartwarming and made you forget how cold it was outside near the railroad track.

To read about these regional cutbacks in Toronto (which remains virtually unaffected) and say, "Damn that wacky government," is one thing; but, to actually go to the towns, and see the people and the geography, and comprehend how that one cutback will change their lives is another.

And, those people, they will manage with the cutbacks. They'll accept it and change the way they live. But you have to question why they have to do that. And you have to wonder if you will ever be in a situation where an outside force will change your way of life without consulting you on the matter. And you have to wonder if you'll ever be able to do anything to stop that outside force.

We finally returned to the Scout Hall — no, not for rest but for a rousing game of, what else, floor hockey. Man, there were cliched Canadian cultural symbols everywhere. Anyone in doubt of Canadian culture or tradition just needs to take a quick trip north, south, east or west of their city, on the train. "Canada" is not often found in the city that you live in, but the cities and towns that you visit. It's ironic that way, isn't it?

## November 26, Kapuskasing

Kapuskasing: pretty hard to spell correctly and consistently, but damn friendly.

The train pulled into the station and five people were waiting there for us with their station wagons and trucks. Our driver took us for a spin around town before taking us to the Inn at the top of the hill, where the last hootenanny would be. He showed us the big pulp mill that the whole town depends on economically, and said that railways are important to Kapuskasing; how else would the *New York Times* get all their pulp from the Kap mill? Good point, I wonder how the *New York Times* feels about the Via cutbacks?

Kapuskasing feels really friendly and, as small towns go, it's a pretty goodlooking small town. Our driver took us to the Kapuskasing Inn where we got a room and lived in luxury for a few hours; there was hot water and a bed.

There weren't as many people at the Sunday night hootenanny but it was Sunday and it was Grey Cup. The bands and the speakers, however, were as strong as on the previous evenings. It was the President of the Seniors in Kapuskasing, Peter Rittick, who accurately and passionately summed up the Via rail situation. He suggested that because the government was made up of businessmen, they were viewing Via as a business and not as a service. Because Via was not turning a profit, (indeed it was creating quite a deficit), it needed to be axed. However, "the government should not be a profit making organization," Rittick explained. "It's here to serve the people." He even offered a concession to the Conservatives. "There is a lot of profit on that railroad track. With the amount of newsprint on these rails, we can well afford a passenger rail. Passenger rail hasn't bankrupt the country yet. Why must it be cut now?"

Kapuskasing Liberal MP Ray Bellair said we were witnessing the dismantling of the only link that held Canada together. Don Fenton, president of the Kapuskasing Action Centre, said that Canada didn't stop at North Bay and neither should the rail service. He suggested that perhaps if Mr. Bouchard were to wait for a train in Kapuskasing some time, he may have a better appreciation for the service.

## November 27, back to Toronto

The train ride back is pretty quiet. Of course, everyone is still playing music, but the breaks between jams (more musician terms) are getting longer. One of the tour members plays with a little girl. The little girl is on the train with her mom going to the hospital in Toronto. The child swallowed some cleaning fluids last year and has been going to Toronto regularly for checkups. Her mom can afford to go regularly by train and she doesn't know what she'll do when the service stops. By bus, she guesses, but that will mean more time away from work.

I've met some interesting and compassionate

people on this trip. I can't decide who benefitted from this tour more, the people in the small towns or us. I know that the musicians carried with them the message that people in Toronto do care about others in Ontario and are willing to sacrifice their time and money to join together in a worthwhile cause. Perhaps the tour was more motivation for those towns. I think the people on tour learned a lot and will always carry something about this trip with them, perhaps an increased awareness of Canadian survival.

And, just because on Monday they cut service doesn't mean the fight is over. If enough pressure is applied to the government, service can be restored. After all, they've just stopped the trains, they haven't ripped up the rails.



' 'Educated aural delight' '

The Grievous Angels.

by Pam Serkowney and Pamela Jarvis

Everyone jump up on the peace train . . .

The Rally for Rails/"Ties That Bind" Tour rolled through a relatively successful opening performance November 24 in the booming metropolis of North Bay (pop. 52,000). And for anyone within earshot of the festivities, it was an evening of educated aural delight.

A pleasant mix of band members, union supporters, political flunkies, artsy college girls and local characters filled the once-sumptuous Empress Dining Room of North Bay's landmark Empire Hotel. As the night wore on, the boys from the back pool room eventually emerged to schmooze and rubberneck with members of a visiting hockey club.

After opening remarks by local politicians and interest groups denouncing the rail cutbacks and blasting the Conservative government ("Save the rails, Scrap the Tories"), those familiar with the depressed local music scene were anxious to rock and roll. (Nothing ever happens before 11 p.m. in North Bay).

The crowd ignored a lukewarm set by opening trio No Mean Feat and eagerly began the "North Bay two-step." That broke the ice for High Lonesome, an engaging C&W five-piece. In a town where people camp overnight for Kenny Rogers tickets, the group's (unfortunately) short-lived set was a guaranteed success.

Next, a spirited turn by The Cajun Ramblers took the audience back home on the bayou. Mid-set, a High Lonesome band member's son was moved to display his step-dancing talents. The crowd definitely warmed to the spicy zydeco sound.

Garage-raunchers U.I.C. served up a surprisingly rootsy, cultural menu. The band scored big points with the rhetorical, "Any hockey players out there?" Replete

with lumberjack shirts and a suitcase-tapping percussionist, U.I.C. captured the very essence of the Northern experience.

The duo of StephenSteve offered a tight, politically conscious acoustic interlude, during which measures were taken to secure popcorn from the Princess Lounge and "gaming" room.

The Grievous Angels capped off the evening with an assortment of traditional and truly Canadian material. The Angels' engaging onstage demeanour was complimented by lyrics both insightful and comic. The band's musical influences were a strange mix of Western, zydeco, Maritime and backwoods bluegrass.

The Angels charmed the audience by communicating a strong regional awareness both musically and politically. Lyrically, gems such as "I followed you from Red Deer to Margaree" and "On a Sudbury Saturday Night" were an obvious delight.

Well the girls are out to bingo  
And the boys are gettin' stinko  
And will think no more about INCO  
On a Sudbury Saturday Night.

Tour participants (also including members of the Skydiggers and the Rheostatics) joined in an enthusiastic finale that culminated in a rousing version of the classic "May The Circle Be Unbroken." Encore potential was cut short by travel demands, to the disappointment of the appreciative audience.

The evening can only be described as an unqualified success; the musicians effectively raised public awareness — it was left to the individual to decide whether to move awareness into action.

In the words of U.I.C., "Talk without action means nothing."