

Adjournment Debate

those lines were made in favour of the CNR, he expressed doubt. Then he did some independent research, and I have a copy of the results which he passed on to me. The special assistant to the Minister of Transport indicated that in Manitoba it is true that in every application heard, the CTC has decided upon abandonment. This is certainly not justice, Mr. Speaker.

I think it is very important that we look at the issues. The PRAC Commission said that if there were a trucking subsidy or some other way that farmers would be able to cope with the expense of hauling their grain, then perhaps there could be some sort of consideration given to rail line abandonment. I have a letter on file from the Minister which indicates there is no way he would even consider any kind of trucking subsidy, yet the Government allows these types of decisions to be made by the CTC.

The Parliamentary Secretary who is in the House to answer my question tonight is pinch hitting for the Government, but I am sure he will pass my concerns on to the Minister. First of all, why is there an inconsistency? There are lines in Saskatchewan, which do not handle anything like the same amount of grain as handled in those areas in Manitoba that are up for abandonment which have been granted an extension. Why is there this type of inconsistency on the part of the Government in terms of decisions that have been allowed?

When hearings are held, the CNR always makes a representation, and the people who support it are given an opportunity to say what it will cost the CNR or the CPR to maintain the line. But there is never any kind of assistance given by the Government to anyone else, such as PRAC, to indicate the economic impact on the community. Why is there no opportunity for people who have served on PRAC, and people within the Department of Transport such as Mr. Henry Roperts, to make adequate presentations indicating what the economic impact would be on those communities?

● (2330)

I would like to hear answers to these questions. I would like to see these injustices which exist where these railways are being abandoned rectified. I hope there is something in the answer of the Parliamentary Secretary which will at least address some of these questions.

Mr. Henri Tousignant (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, let me say first of all that after listening to the Hon. Member, I would be tempted to agree with him. Of course, I too would like to have my own airport. Hon. Members of that

Party are the ones who cry when the deficit goes up. How can they reconcile this?

It seems to me the Hon. Member has two concerns. One relates to what he describes as "the tarnished record of the western division of the CTC". The other is in regard to the hearing process conducted by the Canadian Transport Commission into branch line abandonments.

Dealing first with the second concern, the Hon. Member objects to intervenors going to what he calls a "three ring circus". I am not sure what he would suggest as an alternative to these public hearings. The Railway Act provides for public hearings, and the CTC makes every effort to ensure that all interested parties are heard on abandonment cases. The Act requires that the CTC determine the viability of branch lines and that it consider socioeconomic factors in making its determination. The alternative to this process would be to allow the CTC to make arbitrary decisions, which I am sure the Hon. Member does not want.

The Hon. Member's other concern is the record of abandonments in his region, and I recognize and compliment him for having the best interests of his constituents at heart. For the record, Mr. Speaker, since the western division of the CTC was established in July, 1979, there have been eight railway abandonment hearings in Manitoba. Of these eight, there is a decision pending on the Erwood Subdivision for part of the line, and a decision has been made on the Rossburn Subdivision allowing a part of the line to be abandoned on condition that a connecting rail line be constructed to ensure the continuation of adequate service.

I understand that as a result of the Hon. Member's question on May 12 the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Flis) arranged a meeting between the Hon. Member and a senior official of the Department of Transport to review the Hon. Member's concerns. I hope this meeting was useful.

I am sure the Hon. Member realizes that, in addition to the process described earlier, decisions of the CTC can be appealed to the Governor in Council. In conclusion, the Government believes that the process for branch line abandonment is extremely fair, and allows all factors to be carefully considered before a decision is taken.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 11 a.m.

At 11.34 p.m. the House adjourned, without question put, pursuant to Standing Order.