

out in its entirety and assess all its ramifications." To use the minister's own words, to do this he planned to set up a prairie rail action committee to further examine the prairie rail authority concept. This government's fondness for study committees is well known. Its unfortunate reluctance to do anything about the recommendations of all these study groups is also very well known, Mr. Speaker.

● (2132)

With all due respect to the Minister of Transport, Mr. Speaker, I just do not think the Prairie Rail Authority concept requires any further study, certainly not a study which might take another year and a half. Why did Mr. Justice Hall and the other commissioners study this whole question of prairie railways and branch lines for almost two years? Surely after that length of time the Prairie Rail Authority concept is not so hasty and ill-conceived that it will now require another year and a half of study before it can be set up. The PRA should be established now. Its practicality and viability can only really be determined by having it operate, and not by any further study, however useful that may be at the time.

The minister's prairie rail action committee is really precisely the opposite of any action; it is the same stalling technique we have so often witnessed from this government in the past; that is, the appearance of taking action on a report or recommendation while actually avoiding doing so.

On May 27, at a meeting with the farmers' representatives in Regina, the Minister of Transport revealed that he wanted certain actions by the railways, the CN and the CP, on the Hall report. Specifically what he wanted was their agreement to transfer certain rail lines between themselves, as recommended in the report; concrete undertakings from the railways that they would immediately begin rebuilding and upgrading the lines involved in the basic network, in return for any cash payments which they might receive from the federal government; and, most important of all, that where any line is abandoned, the roadbed property should revert to the federal government, which, after consultation with the provinces, and only after consultation, might then be offered to the provinces involved.

This is directly contrary to the recommendations of the Hall report, namely that all abandoned lines be given to the provinces in which they are located to be disposed of as agreed between the provinces and the municipalities. The commission recommended that the federal government only should assist the provinces and municipalities in covering the higher road costs they will face as a result of branch line abandonment, and that the federal government compensate municipalities for this loss in tax revenues resulting from abandonment.

To me the establishment of another committee by the Minister of Transport to stall further the establishment of the Prairie Rail Authority, plus his recent offer of \$100 million directly to the western railways for upgrading which will be overseen by the Canadian Transport Commission in Ottawa, demonstrates that this government has in fact rejected the Hall commission report. The extreme central Canada bias of

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this government on the issue of rail transport in western Canada is evident once again. This government just does not want authority over transportation anywhere in Canada to be controlled by a body outside the CTC.

The present head of the CTC is a former Liberal member from Kingston and the Islands, and a former federal finance minister whose partiality and political bias has been all too evident in the past. I just do not believe that this government is interested in letting regulatory authority over rail transportation in western Canada be given to a western authority, not even when it involves an issue as fundamental and as important to the west as the rail transportation of grain.

Unless there is a change of attitude on the part of this government soon, I am afraid that we are heading toward a tremendous future federal-provincial confrontation over the issues of railways, the sharing of resources, provincial property rights and, ultimately, the very division of powers under the constitution.

Mr. Peter Elzinga (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, I too appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate on Bill C-17, an act to amend the Canadian National Railways Capital Revision Act, the Railway Act and to amend and repeal certain other statutes in consequence thereof.

This bill in reality, in general terms, broadens the financial aspect of the Canadian National Railways. Just prior to expressing my own thoughts on this matter may I take the opportunity to commend the hon. member for Portage (Mr. Masniuk), who has just concluded his remarks. Since coming here in 1974 it has been obvious to me and other members of this chamber that he has done a very competent and thorough job of representing his constituency, and the people in that area have been well served by his contribution in the House of Commons.

Let me take this opportunity when speaking on Bill C-17 to make some representation in respect of an area in my constituency, specifically the town of Fort Saskatchewan. Just this evening I spoke with the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) when he was in the House. We discussed the possibility of the town receiving some funds for rail relocation, perhaps under the urban transportation assistance program. It is the responsibility of the Minister of Transport and the Minister of State for Urban Affairs (Mr. Ouellet) to disburse funds under this program in accordance with the recommendations of ministers from various provinces. As a result, we would also have to deal with the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Horner) from Alberta.

Under this program \$2 per capita per year is granted for projects such as rail relocation. I should like to make representations to the effect that Fort Saskatchewan receive funding under the urban transportation assistance program to move the railway out of the town. This town has a population of about 10,000 people. On speaking this evening to Muriel Abdurahman, one of the town councillors, she suggested that we have the three levels of government and the Canadian National Railways participate in the funding of this relocation. This