

CNR and Air Canada

of view. It conveniently disposes of the kind of evidence that we need. It is the kind of evidence that I submit CPR does not want to present. All the revenue from stations like Milestone, Yellow Grass, points north, south, east and west of Regina, is lumped into one bag at the customer service centre at Regina.

I and many others will continue to oppose these applications. Canadian National has one now pending to close a large number of stations in Saskatchewan. We will oppose that application as hard as we opposed the one made by Canadian Pacific during the winter unless they can present evidence to show that those customer service centres are in fact providing better service and earning more revenue than they provided prior to making the application to close these agencies.

As one who was a station agent for 15 years and worked in the CPR's dirty old stations under their archaic rules, watching the day to day operations of the railway I can only say it was a "helluva" way to run a railway. In my opinion, since the second world war the CPR, followed by the CNR, has pursued a deliberate policy that has had the end result of relieving the company of any responsibility for providing carload or less than carload, passenger, telegraph and other ancillary transportation and communications services for hundreds of communities along dozens of branch lines in western Canada. One can only come to that conclusion having watched first hand the CPR's attitude over the last 25 years, its failure to modernize its buildings and re-equip its stations in scores of communities.

I remember that for years after electricity came to the town I was living in when I was a station agent, the CPR was still burning coal oil lamps as well coal in old heaters. And they expected the public to rush to give them business when they had those kind of facilities. Why should they? That sort of thing helped to drive people away. The infrequency of trains, or for that matter truck service, coupled at the same time with rates that were always higher than their trucking competitors, resulted in a fall in business and this in revenue. The company then comes to us and pleads poverty, says it is losing money, and can they close agencies and branch lines? I submit there is, call it a compromise if you will, but I submit a better way. I hope Canadian National will follow it instead of adopting the same buccaneer attitude shown by the CPR toward the Canadian people over the years.

While I agree that there is no point in trying to maintain open agencies at little villages and hamlets of 50 or 100 people, there are viable communities of significant size of 300, 500, 1,000 people that will support an open transportation agency. I should like to suggest that for these middle and larger sized rural communities, not only on the Prairies but right across Canada, there be established a transportation and communications service centre that would provide a completely integrated service for local communities and neighbouring smaller communities.

I suggest that a community transportation and communications service centre should offer the following: loading and unloading facilities for carload and less than carload freight and express, both rail and truck. It could also be the bus terminal. If the particular community is on a bus route of one or more bus companies, it could also be

[Mr. Benjamin.]

the bus terminal. It would have rail and bus express facilities, telex and telephone service. Have you ever driven into a small rural community in the middle of the night, Mr. Speaker, and been unable to find a telephone or even a pay booth? Do you realize that with the exception of the nine cities and the handful of larger towns there is no place else in the whole province of Saskatchewan where you can send or receive a written message? This community transportation and communications service centre could also offer a fairly large selection of freight, express and passenger tariffs for all modes of transportation, be it air, rail, bus or truck. If any tariffs were not to hand, the agent at that transportation and communications service centre could quickly obtain access via telex or telephone to the tariffs he did not have.

The public would be able to ship anything they wanted. The public would be able to buy any ticket they wanted, whether bus, rail, steamship or air line. This transportation and communications service centre would be staffed by 2 or 3 people, of even one man, who would serve not only the public in that community but would be required to visit neighbouring small communities to solicit business, look after claims and call on customers, as opposed to the attitude that is presently being shown by the railways. At the moment if you ask them to ship an article weighing 1,000 pounds, the railway treats you as though they are doing you a favour, mostly because they do not have either sufficient facilities or service. In addition, they have rates that scare you away. I recall one time when the CPR was going to put a minimum rate of \$4.85 on a five gallon can of cream. I was a station agent at the time, so I looked up the tariff and found I could ship that can of cream on a lower berth much cheaper.

Such transportation and communications service centres in these communities would be part of the local scene. They would have the advantage of being closer to and more readily available to the public. The businessmen of the area would know where to go to forward and to pick up shipments. At the present time packages are dumped on the street or in front of a general store, which is closed, or beside the railroad track. If you are lucky you will receive a postcard telling you there is a parcel waiting for you at the side of the ditch in Gopher Gulch 15 miles away.

At a transportation and communications service centre the public would be able to make reservations. They could purchase passage tickets for any mode of transportation. They could send or receive a written message, which in most parts of rural Canada they can no longer do. They could enquire and obtain information primarily about rates and conditions of carriage. These are a few of the many facets of services that could be provided with a real public service rail transportation system in Canada.

• (1630)

Mr. Gleave: Which we had at one time.

Mr. Benjamin: I agree we did have such services at one time. This situation has only developed since World War II when the private enterprise theory in particular was put into operation by our railway system.