

*Rail Transport*

member for Bruce (Mr. Whicher) who, on October 22, when discussing the CNR financing bill, said, as recorded at page 7095 of *Hansard*:

I said I was frustrated because I have spoken on this subject on numerous occasions and have listened to others speak on it, but nothing has happened. I also have a feeling of hopelessness, because I am almost totally certain that no matter what the opposition has said in the past or this afternoon and no matter what I say, nothing will happen. The CNR will carry on in its own way, doing exactly as it sees fit. It will not pay one iota of attention to the wishes of the House of Commons. Certainly, this has happened in the past, as far as I can see. The fact is that our feelings, as voiced by the constructive criticism which has been given by members of this House, are shared, in my opinion, by the people of Canada. Those feelings the CNR has completely ignored over the years.

● (1700)

With respect, I suggest that the members of one side of this House are in the position to do something. Surely, I do not exaggerate when I say that the government has the right, the ability—to do something about this. Canadian National Railways may be a very important segment of the economy of Canada, but if they think they are bigger than the government of Canada or the Parliament of Canada, they have gone too far. I suggest respectfully, and I say this apologetically as I hope members of the opposition will appreciate the position I am in, that the government is obligated, not only to Parliament but to the people of Canada, to move into this field and, especially in extreme situations, to act.

My only comment on that particular part of the hon. member's speech is that I wish I had been the author of those words. Without reservation or qualification, I adopt everything that the hon. member for Bruce (Mr. Whicher) said on that occasion.

The various individuals, groups and organizations of the area affected must share this feeling of hopelessness and even helplessness. The case for restoration has been made forcefully over the past few years from all segments of society in the area affected, and by a standing committee of this House, unanimously, as well as individual members of all parties. The purpose of my motion, therefore, is not to plead the case for restoration of passenger rail service. In my opinion, the case has been made successfully. My sole purpose is to point out why this situation has been allowed to exist.

I suggest the finger of guilt can be pointed in many directions. May I mention just three groups, the first being the railways. The railways have been guilty of deliberately downgrading their service. As a result of that, they built up enough evidence of disuse to convince the Canadian Transport Commission to approve their application for the elimination of these passenger trains. Since then, in spite of the uproar, the railways have continued to downgrade services, not passenger services because there are none. They have continued to downgrade the railbed. They have ignored their responsibility to adjacent land owners. All of this can be documented. Indeed, such documentation has been sent to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand).

One example I might give is an application for fence repair that was made on June 1 this year by 11 farmers in my constituency. After sending four letters to Mr. Benson of the CTC and correspondence to the railway concerned, I received correspondence confirming that the tender for fence repair has been let and that the fences would be

repaired by the end of November. That is six months following the date of requisition. It may be of some comfort to the Minister of Transport to know he can get a fence repaired in six months, but I will point out to him that the climate in my area is of such a nature that we do not need many fences in the winter when our pastures are buried in the snow. We asked for the fence to be fixed in June. It will be fixed in November.

The second group to which I want to point the finger of guilt is the CTC. As hon. members can appreciate from the example I have given, I am not very enamoured with their responses to situations for which they have a responsibility. I feel they deliberately ignore their responsibility on occasion. Dealing with rail passenger service, I accuse them of a number of things. First, I believe they relied on bad evidence when they granted the discontinuance. Second, they allowed themselves to be completely misled by the railways in that particular hearing. Third, it appears they did not make a decision independently of railway pressure. Indeed, one is forced to the conclusion they are almost in collusion with the railway companies of this country. In any event, the most charitable thing that can be said about the CTC is that it has become a comfortable haven for the Hon. J. Edgar Benson.

The third person who must stand accused of this deplorable situation is the Minister of Transport. I examined very carefully the minister's answers to questions in this House since January on the subject of railway passenger service. The attitude exemplified in those answers simply defies logic. First, the minister defied the unanimous recommendation of a standing committee of this House. The great majority of the members of that committee are Liberals. I believe they are sincere, hard working members, as indeed are all members of that committee.

Second, his answers to the many questions in this House during question periods since January attempted to relate this issue to the rapid transit problems in and around the city of Toronto. May I hasten to say that I in no way minimize the problems of that large metropolitan area. I assume they are of a very severe and important nature to the hundreds of thousands of people who must rely on some form of transportation around the city of Toronto. I do not minimize the importance of that. I simply say that rail passenger service in southwestern Ontario, the area which I and members of adjacent constituencies represent, has nothing to do with the rapid transit system in and around the city of Toronto. The smokescreen drawn by the minister in reply to serious questions by many members of this House, not just the party I represent, does not do him or the government he represents justice. It is a great discredit to the people living in and about southwestern Ontario who have no means of public transportation.

Third, the only positive step, and I say this very charitably, is that a study has been ordered. This is not a study by his department or a standing committee of this House. It is not a bilevel or trilevel study. It is not a study whose participants received any local input. The study is by the CTC. I cannot think of anyone less equipped in view of the history of this issue to study passenger service in southwestern Ontario than the CTC which has made a bad decision. They have not done anything to correct it. I