

Railway Act

Mr. Laing: For a few moments I should like to make some remarks concerning this bill. I will not be as pessimistic concerning its future as the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra.

Mr. Low: That would be refreshing.

Mr. Laing: In the main it is a very good bill.

Mr. Green: I agree with you.

Mr. Laing: It is a bill which as a start implements the report of the Turgeon commission on transportation. I want to say that I do not think a finer report has ever been presented to a government of Canada by any commission appointed. There is material in that report that will stand us in good stead, transportationwise, for many many years in Canada. As the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra said, this bill, as a beginning—perhaps just a beginning—of the implementation of that report, I think is a little bit of a monument in transportation affairs in the Dominion of Canada. We do not realize what the railways have meant to Canada. In our own case, in the province of British Columbia, it was by virtue of the guarantee that the railway would come west that we came into confederation. In the days when the railways first went through, transportation was simple and the railways' revenue was secure. That situation does not pertain today. The railways are being harassed on every side by every other competing mode of transportation. In our own city of Vancouver today we have 25 trucks coming in daily from San Francisco, with two drivers to a truck, 50 hours out of San Francisco. They do not back their freight load against a team-track downtown; they back it right up to the warehouse or put it inside the warehouse. The railways, with fixed rolling stock and fixed locations and so on, are sitting ducks for that type of competition. We have a railway problem in Canada because the nature of traffic in this country is such that we cannot move it, and will not be able to move it for many years to come, or at least in the foreseeable future, without railways. That is why we have a railway problem.

I know many Canadians in my part of the country who occasionally ride on United States railways as passengers. They come back and say: "Why can't we have these lovely trains in Canada that they have in the United States?" Well, last year Canada lost \$20 million on passenger transportation, and I do not know that they would be justified in providing any better equipment than we have today. For the volume of

[Mr. Green.]

traffic they have and the distance over which they run I think their passenger service is very very good indeed.

The railways have done a great work for Canada. One of the great things they did was to provide a group of men who came in as pioneers to build a railroad, and who have left first and second generations of people who are very important in all parts of the Dominion of Canada. By some means or other the Canadian Pacific Railway commanded a loyalty among its employees, which I think was reflected too in the case of the Canadian National Railways probably under the chairmanship of the late Sir Henry Thornton, when the national system was brought together in the twenties; and out of that loyalty to their firms there have been given to Canada a great many men who have made great contributions in business—yes, and in this House of Commons as well—because we have had in the past a great number of men in this house, including one or two at present, who have come from the railways, and they have been outstanding citizens.

Passenger traffic today is being lost to the bus lines, and the expensive rear-end traffic of the railways today, over long distances at least, is largely being carried by the aeroplane; and we can expect an increase in that. At the present time we are carrying some 1,400 passengers a day out of our great airport at Vancouver. That is about four trainloads of passengers. That traffic will increase in the future rather than decrease.

Some parts of this bill are of very great concern to Canada, and are outstandingly good. One of them is the \$7 million provision. For generations we in Canada have regarded this country as an east and a west with a great gulf fixed between. If this provision to take care of that so-called desert, or non-productive area around the head of the lakes, does nothing more than make the Canadian people realize that we are one country and we are bridging that gap, it will be money extremely well spent.

In the bill there is a definition of eastern territory and western territory. The eastern territory is beyond a line drawn from Armstrong, Ontario to Port Arthur. That provides for shipment from the eastern territory into the intermediate territory by transcontinental roads to all the vast productive area of Ontario and Quebec and such productive areas as we have in the maritimes; and we in British Columbia draw steel products from the maritimes as well. In the case of the western territory, it is defined as a very narrow strip along the Pacific coast. As a matter of fact it is from Mission City to