

National Transportation Hearings

people of Vancouver Island who do not wish their passenger service discontinued.

Mr. Fred McCain (Carleton-Charlotte): Mr. Speaker, I would have to agree with the views expressed by the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar (Mr. Hnatyshyn). The number of opportunities for the House to consider the activities of the Canadian Transport Commission or even of the Department of Transport in depth are few and far between, and it looks as though they will be unusually limited this session.

There are a number of items which should be considered, both by the department and by the commission. Applications such as those referred to by the hon. member for Comox-Alberni (Mr. Anderson) come before the Canadian Transport Commission without any onus upon the applicant for abandonment of service to prove that there is in fact no business. There is no onus upon the applicant to prove that he or she has made a proper effort to obtain the business which might be available in the area to be abandoned. There is no onus upon the Canadian Transport Commission to consider seriously the human, industrial or social needs for a particular service and to say in an unqualified way that the carrier must continue the service which he has suggested he should abandon.

● (1732)

I am particularly concerned about the aspect of the situation in which the carrier is not requested to indicate how much business is in the area and what effort the carrier has made to obtain that business. It appears to the public that the carrier very often may deliberately reduce service to a level which makes it totally unacceptable to the shipper or passenger. Having become totally unacceptable, it is of course not properly patronized, and the application for abandonment of the particular service automatically follows.

I think the questions which I raised in the House today put an exclamation mark after this procedure, over which the government apparently has no control or, if the government and the CTC do have control, the minister of many years is not prepared at this moment to state what element of control they do have. A carrier may be permitted to abandon a service, the transportation of a product, without application to the CTC, and this is a very dangerous situation.

I understand the reasons for the presentation of this bill, but I must say that because it deals with an isolated instance it cannot be used as an instrument to justify the limitation of the power of the CTC to change its position. Nor can it justify itself on a national basis because it cites a specific instance. My sympathies are with the applicant and with the residents of Windsor-Walkerville who are concerned about this problem, but I would not like to see this matter considered in the committee as an individual case with relation to the CTC, its decisions and what rights of appeal there are. I would like to see this bill go to the committee so that there can be an opportunity to consider the general transportation problems of Canada and the decisions which are being made by the CTC.

[Mr. Anderson.]

I would like this subject matter to go to the committee so that we might get a proper delineation of the opportunity to appeal to the CTC when service is not officially suspended but in practice is, as is the case with the CPR and the potato industry in the province of New Brunswick, and as is that case with respect to perishable food products and processed products in the Dominion of Canada. There has been a virtual withdrawal by the railroad systems from their responsibility to transport these products.

If this bill were to go to committee and if the government permitted a broad study of the responsibilities of the railroads, the authority of the minister and the authority of the CTC so that these things might be spelled out, the bill might then be amended, not just as it refers to the CTC and a specific case but, rather, as it refers to transportation problems in Canada generally. I strongly recommend that this bill go to a committee on that basis. It would be unfortunate if it went to committee and was considered only with respect to a specific instance because the subject matter is much broader than that. I do not offer any prejudice to the specific instance outlined in this bill, but I do want to use it as an example of a broad transportation problem in all of Canada.

If the bill could go to the committee in that context, I think we could have a very proper discussion on how the government, the CTC and the railroad structure of Canada could combine to give better service on a broad basis and assure all Canadians that where service is essential the railroads shall be obligated to continue that service.

Mr. Alan Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to add a few words in this debate and to commend the hon. member for Windsor-Walkerville (Mr. MacGuigan) for once again putting before this House the whole question of the interaction between the railways and the Canadian Transport Commission and, more particularly, the railway transport committee of the CTC.

As one who is somewhat familiar with the problem faced by the hon. member for Windsor-Walkerville by virtue of a similar problem in my own riding some years ago which cropped up again within the last year, for which I was, thanks to the co-operation of the House, able to get through a private member's bill which amended the Railway Act in this connection, it seems to me that there is a real need to examine closely the jurisprudence which the CTC, through its railway transport committee, is going to use to assist people. I am thinking particularly of people in urban areas which perhaps were not so heavily built up years ago when the railways first went through but have since become very heavily urbanized. In some cases homes were built closer to railway facilities than they should have been.

I think what the hon. member for Windsor-Walkerville is touching on is what position the CTC should be taking in relation to the railways. In the past I think there has been concern amongst ordinary residents who run into problems with the railways that they are in the position of fighting city hall. Even though there is a federal authority in place, there is