

Canadian National Railways and Air Canada

be repaired. It is interesting to note that on two of these three matters the government and the Wheat Board are already taking action. As for the third matter, the Canadian Transportation Commission has finally announced it will overhaul the slide detector fences.

Since that date I have said we should build more boxcars for the Canadian Wheat Board to move our grain, but it became vividly clear in the transportation committee that the government's priorities were entirely out of whack. The number of boxcars to move grain had fallen from something like 88,000 to 42,000. This caused the Canadian farmers and Canadian voters to think what a great government this was which in the fall of 1972 was going to build 2,000 more boxcars. We were told that the western farmers should throw out their chests and vote for this fellow in charge of the Wheat Board because he was going to build 2,000 additional boxcars, which would mean that grain would move smoothly and there would be no trouble.

Today, a year or so after these cars have come into operation, we learn that we are running 125 million bushels behind last year in our grain movements. Let us scratch our heads and ask why. The facts are out: the railroads have completely discarded the issue of building more cars. Canadian National officials admitted to the committee that in the year 1972 they were building 3,400 additional cars—though it might have been 3,450; I do not have the proceedings of the committee with me. These cars would be delivered during the year 1972.

Then some young, interested member, I think the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski), asked how many of these cars would be available to move grain. Well, they pondered, shook their heads and said that, really, without a great deal of renovation none of them could move grain. So here again we ask, where are the priorities in respect of the capitalization expenditures of Canadian National Railways?

● (2100)

It is interesting to note that in a *Free Press* item of December 22, 1973—not too long ago—it was reported that Canadian National Railways ordered 94 gondola cars, weighing 100 tons apiece, for the movement of Alberta coal to British Columbia. So they are building cars. It has been said by some people that the railway does not build cars for the movement of grain because of the cursed Crowsnest Pass rates. They are supposed to be the root and evil of it all. Well, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to give the House a brief rundown concerning the Crowsnest Pass rates, why they were arrived at and why westerners generally stick pretty tight on the issue that they should be maintained. Briefly, however, they are the Magna Carta, the saviour of western Canada and the railways have not really proved that they lose money moving grain under them.

I see, Mr. Speaker, that you are becoming slightly anxious, so I shall conclude my remarks. I know other members are desirous of taking part in this debate. If the Crowsnest Pass rates are the cause of the shortage of boxcars, why is there a shortage of boxcars for the movement of lumber on the railway in British Columbia? Lumber does not come under such a rate; the going rate is

[Mr. Horner (Crowfoot).]

applicable in that case. Grain is the bread and butter issue of the CNR and the CPR. I said once to the president of the Canadian Pacific Railway that if they did not have grain to move across the Prairies, they would have to roll up the tracks—and he said that would be the case. The bread and butter movement on the Prairies for the railways is the movement of grain. They could not have survived without this movement. In no way do the railways lose money through the movement of grain.

I should like to take another 20 minutes to document fully what I am saying. However, I shall merely say at this time that I hope, no matter who is elected chairman of the transport and communications committee, it will delve deeper into the problems of transportation and the movement of goods all across Canada so that we can really assess what are the priorities for the expenditure of capital by the Canadian railways, both CNR and CPR.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have an opportunity to take part in this debate, particularly after waiting many months for this bill to return to the chamber. I am particularly delighted because of the amendments with which we are dealing. I have never before heard such irrelevancy in a debate as I heard this evening from the hon. member for Mississauga (Mr. Blenkarn). He spent his time dealing with hotels and needles. He did not spend very much time on the matter of transportation and the CNR financing bill. He could have spoken about national transportation and some of the items mentioned by the hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner), who spoke of the transportation needs of this country. He might even have tried to bring in an amendment in order to accomplish something.

The type of amendments which require consideration are the type that would be moved by the hon. member for Crowfoot, the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski) or myself; but they would probably be ruled out of order. If we were really dealing with the situation in respect of the railways and airlines of Canada, the government would have before us a bill which would place these systems under public ownership so they could be integrated and provide a national transportation service which would meet the transportation needs of this country.

I am not particularly interested in the foibles of the CNR or the CPR in terms of a national transportation act which is designed only to make sure that the railways and the airlines place operating profit first and service second. We should reverse that situation. The CNR financing bill and many other related matters are mostly irrelevant. It would have been much better had the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) seen to it that in some of this capitalization there was an expenditure of money for rolling-stock, track maintenance, signal systems and all those things mentioned by the hon. member for Crowfoot. However, he did not see fit to do that. He did not see fit to meet with the officials of the CNR and the CPR and have the Board of Transport Commissioners require the CNR or the CPR to make some moves now.

In an all-encompassing transportation system it seems logical that there should be some hotels; they are nothing more than an adjunct to the transportation operation and the movement of people. The hon. member for Mississauga mentioned the sale of the Bessborough Hotel. I hope I am