

Canadian National Railways and Air Canada

In reference to the CN financing bill, and specifically the amendments, what members of this House must impress upon the CN and CTC is the fact that the CN has an obligation to move goods and passengers for the wellbeing of all Canadians, and it should not and must not concentrate on activities which take away from that priority.

I suggest that the management of hotels by the CN has at best been shoddy. They are not competitive, and I am sure that we would have all the hotel space we need if hotel construction had been left to the private entrepreneur. I suggest that CN management should concentrate its efforts on doing one job well rather than expecting the Canadian taxpayers to blindly sign one cheque after another in order that the CN can follow its priorities, which too often seem to be in conflict with the priorities it was set up to follow, and definitely in conflict with the priorities many Canadians have set for the CNR.

Mr. Reg Stackhouse (Scarborough East): Mr. Speaker, I rise to participate in this debate for two reasons. The first is to join with others in focusing attention on the lack of interest being shown by certain officials of the CNR for the people of Canada whom they purport to serve, and the other is to draw attention to the inadequacy of public ownership unless it is accompanied by concern for the people.

To illustrate the first point, I should like to draw to the attention of the House an experience my family and I had just a few weeks ago when travelling by CNR from Toronto to Ottawa. This was at a time when the management of that railway should have been fully aware that there would be a greater demand on their service than ordinarily, as it was a time when there were two major conventions being held in Ottawa and when the annual winter school break in the province of Ontario was beginning. It might well have been anticipated that there would be an extra demand for service. Instead, there was an inadequate supply of cars for the use of passengers wanting to make a journey to such places as Kingston, Montreal and Ottawa, with the result that a considerable number of people had to stand. Indeed, there were so many extra passengers on this train that the conductor had to find accommodation for some of them in the washrooms. I think we should recognize this as simply another illustration of the way in which the railways are not giving priority to the people whom the company was designed to service, the same people who have been supporting the railway.

I think one of the good results of this debate the House has been having, and of this amendment which I hope will carry, is that we are drawing attention to a mistake on which we should focus, namely that the people must come first and the CNR must adopt the policy of making them come first. This is not what the railway has been doing. The railway has to a great extent been giving the impression that it is interested primarily in freight and, to the degree it serves the people at all, it treats them like freight. What we want to say to the management of this railway is that it must start putting the people first. We recognize the concern, efficiency and dedication of the fine staff the railway employs. Indeed, without the calibre of the men and women working at various levels for the

[Mr. Epp.]

railway, the services might not be as good as they are. What we want is direction from the top. What the country needs from this railway is what it needs from the government, and that is leadership from the top which is concerned about the people.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stackhouse: The second point I should like to make in my remarks is the fact that the policy manifested by the experience to which I have referred, and indeed emphasized by the many other examples hon. members have cited, illustrates that socialization is not in itself a solution to all the problems of this country. One of the impressions one often gets from speakers for the NDP is that the solution to every problem can be found in the nationalization of an industry or perhaps the appointment of another government board. One really does not get anything from either unless you have leadership, be it in private or public enterprises, which puts the people first. One does not get that simply by providing a government takeover. It is a simplistic, tragic and serious mistake to assume that the government and the people are one and the same, and that if the government engineers a takeover or initiates regulations through a board, then the people will be served. Sometimes it is only the interests of those the government has appointed that are served. Very often they, themselves, have a vested bureaucratic interest which takes priority over the interests of the ordinary people. Therefore, I should like to emphasize that the attitude of the parliament and government of Canada in respect of the CNR as well as other corporations ought to be this: You have been established by the people to serve the people. Make that your priority and get on with it.

We see a particular need for this attitude with regard to the need for rapid public transit in areas surrounding our major urban centres. We see it, for example, in metro Toronto where a great step forward could be taken to serve the transit needs of a large number of commuters, and people making their way to and from work day by day if the railroad lines were used as they could be used in an effective public transit program. I recognize that such a program cannot be undertaken simply by the CNR or the federal government. It certainly involves consultation and co-operation with provincial and local jurisdictions, but the federal government surely has within its powers the ability to show initiative. It certainly has within its rights the opportunity to lead. One result we could see would be the beginning of greater enterprise in utilizing the rights of way leading into the heart of great urban centres such as metro Toronto in such a manner that thousands and thousands of commuters could make their way to the heart of the city day by day on a rapid public transit system free from pollution.

There are various reasons that this proposal must be given priority, one of which has been illustrated in recent months by the so-called energy crisis, much over emphasized and over dramatized by the government through the use of such terms as "crisis", but nonetheless of sufficient proportion to make us all aware of what indeed will happen if we do not take seriously the lesson that has come to us through the events of the last year. Therefore, we have to see the need now to make a major change from