

office, rather than the railway initiating repairs on its own. On June 22 and 25, the fieldman of the Federation of Agriculture talked personally to the district engineer of the railway at the regional office. The engineer indicated he hoped to have something definite before the end of July. On June 29, after a meeting of the directors of the Federation of Agriculture, the fieldman wrote the district engineer asking that definite action be taken prior to July 15. A copy of his letter was sent to me. This was the first time I was made aware of the problem.

On July 9 and 17 I wrote to the Hon. Edgar J. Benson, president of the Canadian Transport Commission, Ottawa, asking for assurance that action would be taken without delay. On July 30 the district engineer of the Canadian Transport Commission in Toronto contacted the federation and obtained the names and addresses of the farmers affected. Remember, this was two months after the requisition had been forwarded. The district engineer of the Canadian Transport Commission is quoted as having said he would forward the recommendations to Ottawa and action would likely be immediate.

On August 10 more requisitions were forwarded to Ottawa. On August 22 the assistant director of the Federation of Agriculture wrote Mr. J. D. Beeton, secretary of the Railway Transportation Committee of the Canadian Transport Commission following a telephone conversation with the railway in Toronto. In this conversation it was stated it might take two months to get the money allocated as it had to be approved by a board in Montreal. Remember, this is a fence in the country which affects 11 farmers.

The letter to Mr. Beeton suggested the railway was dragging its feet. It stated the farmers would appreciate any help that could be given. A copy of this letter was also sent to me, and I again wrote to the Canadian Transport Commission. This takes us to the end of August. On September 12 I wrote a third letter to the Hon. Edgar J. Benson asking for immediate action. I raised this matter in the House of Commons on September 21 by way of a question to the Minister of Agriculture, in the absence of the Minister of Transport. On September 24 I received a letter from Mr. Benson acknowledging my letter of September 12. He indicated that the transport committee of this commission had taken up the matter with the railway. The last paragraph is interesting. I quote:

● (2110)

I thought you should know your representations have not escaped our attention in spite of the period of time which has elapsed since you first brought this matter to my attention. I will keep you informed as to developments.

This takes us almost to the end of September when I wrote to the Minister of Agriculture, with a copy to the Minister of Transport, sending him my complete file on this matter. In the last two or three weeks I have received an acknowledgment from the Minister of Agriculture and another letter from an assistant to the Minister of Transport acknowledging receipt of the correspondence. I received a further letter from the Federation of Agriculture in Toronto, at least a copy of a letter to the Transport Commission dated October 12, indicating that the work had not been started. Then I received a letter on Friday from the secretary of the CTC indicating that the work

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had been done. Which of these two letters is accurate, I do not know.

I cite this correspondence to show that if there is frustration and anger in southwestern Ontario, it is justified. This anger and frustration is not partisan, as was so well shown by the hon. member for Bruce. I suggest that the railways and the CTC are deliberately avoiding their responsibilities. No doubt they intend, as they did in the case of passengers and mail, to downgrade the service until the business is lost. No doubt they will apply for abandonment.

The Minister of Transport seems content to allow the present course of events to continue even in the face of a unanimous recommendation by the standing committee, in the face of the economics of the situation and in the face of the economics of the situation and in the face of common sense. I can only conclude that the situation in southwestern Ontario is simply a penalty for those ridings which return members who are not members of the Liberal Party, the only exception being the hon. member for Bruce who is trapped in a net because he is surrounded on two sides by water and on two sides by Tories. Thus he is in the same position as we are. It is a sad commentary on the just society.

Mr. Gordon Ritchie (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a few comments on the CNR financing bill which deals especially with the financial aspects of the CNR and Air Canada, the two largest carriers in their class in the country. The mere fact that no public audit has been presented to the House of Commons dealing with the financial aspect of the affairs of these companies, together with the failure of the government to refer the annual reports to the transport committee, indicates that all is not well in the transportation field as far as these publicly-owned carriers are concerned.

My riding, being highly rural with a relatively static population, is not faced with many of the problems such as urban sprawl, transportation and housing which confront metropolitan areas, but it is vitally interested in the retention of an adequate rail system and in the policy concerning branch line abandonment. Like the rest of western Canada, the area is heavily dependent upon grain as the main agricultural crop, the production of wheat complementing the grain growing. This means that should the transportation system be further reduced, it would likely result in a corresponding reduction in the productivity of the area.

As far as my constituency is concerned, proposals for branch line abandonment must be considered together with the so-called grain rationalization proposals affecting local elevators; how many would remain in operation, where they would be situated, and what is to be their capacity. Events of the last few months have shown that the world is faced with food scarcities and seems to have narrowly escaped a major food shortage. This has a strong bearing on railway transportation problems in the west.

The relatively rapid increase in the cost of diesel fuel, and the prospect of further substantial increases in the months and years ahead, bring into focus the interaction of various transportation systems and in particular the relative competitive ability of the trucking industry and