

Supply

If the minister tells us that the railways will be persuaded to improve their lines, I am not going to believe him. It is true the railways have been given a \$40 million grant by way of boxcars, but can anyone imagine them rushing to spend two or three million dollars on rights of way? They will obviously not be much impressed by the type of argument which the minister uses. They will take no action.

What will the railways do? They will simply close off those rural lines as soon as possible. They have already given an indication of the branches they intend to close. It is not a secret. The minister knows this. Can he tell us, for example, of any lines which the railways have stated they intend to improve? Not one. They will improve none of these lines. What the Minister of Justice may tell us in the House of Commons is beside the point. No extra money will be put in either before or after 1975. The fact has to be accepted that the lines will be maintained until 1975. I had a very interesting experience in connection with the Chelan line. I had to challenge the president of the Canadian National, Mr. McMillan, on that particular point in order to get a bridge rebuilt.

Does the minister think the government will be able to convince the companies to rebuild the rights of way, putting in more ballast or whatever is necessary throughout the whole of the system in this area? I come from an old railway family. My father worked hard on the railway and I grew up to understand the railway business. I appreciate the difficulties the companies have experienced. But I say the minister's assurance that the railways will change their attitude is not worth a pinch of salt. Why should they suddenly reverse the position they took five years ago when they prepared documents for the Transport Commission specifying the lines they wanted to close? Nothing the government has presented to them will change their minds. The provincial governments have done nothing except document the fact that their action will cost the farmers more money.

The Minister of Justice, who speaks for the Wheat Board, has had to account for the \$40 million expenditure on boxcars. Originally he said it was \$48 million, and that is the figure that registers in the mind of the public. Now he says it is \$40 million. So he has done a heck of a lot for them. But what has he really done? He is speeding up the closure of the lines which are not able to accept those cars.

There is no way in which the minister can bring pressure to bear upon his colleague, the Minister of Transport. Witness what happened yesterday. The Minister of Agriculture did not appear before the committee in defence of farmers. He gave an explanation to justify his absence. But the whole cabinet, 23 or 26 members, put pressure on the Minister of Agriculture and he could not be present to accept the fact that farmers need an increase in some of the prices they have been getting. In the last few days the Minister of Agriculture has been subjected to pressure from other members of the cabinet, including the Minister of Justice, the minister from Saskatchewan.

An hon. Member: You don't know what you are talking about.

[Mr. Korchinski.]

Mr. Korchinski: I am sorry to say so, but what I have said is the situation. Can the government tell us that up to this point they have initiated talks on this question or made a written request to the railway companies? If they have not, the closure of these lines will take place in 1975.

• (1520)

Although I think this whole thing was started by a group of people who felt it was necessary, the government has the final decision. It is the government in power which has the right to stop this closure in its tracks. I cannot simplify it for hon. members any more than that. The fact is that we must keep these railways in operation. I suggest there is only one thing for the minister in charge of the Wheat Board to do, and that is to divert these cars from the main line to the other lines.

Mr. Lang: Nonsense.

Mr. Korchinski: The minister has done nothing like that, and he now admits it.

Mr. Lang: No, I did not. I said "Nonsense."

Mr. Korchinski: If the minister says it is nonsense, I will accept his word for it. Nonsense is nonsense if it comes from the Minister of Justice. The minister will admit that he has no jurisdiction over the railways or over the Minister of Transport. Is the minister going to bring pressure on the Minister of Transport to use heavier steel for these lines? I have a close connection with the railways because my father was a rail line maintenance man, and I know that if the Minister of Justice cannot get the Minister of Transport to use heavier rails we are going to be stuck with smaller cars, which in turn will mean less movement of freight.

A few years ago the Minister of Justice made a speech in which he said there would be only five or six terminal points across Canada. The minister must explain—

Mr. Lang: A point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Order. The Minister of Justice is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Lang: I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but I know there is a tendency, not only on the hon. member's part but also on the part of his colleagues, to suggest that if I sit silent I approve of what is said. Therefore I must make the point that at no time have I favoured a system that would use a small number of inland terminals. The suggestion has been made along that line by some people, and it is one of the proposals studied in the grain handling and transportation report, but I have personally never advocated at any time that particular configuration.

The Chairman: That is not a point of order but a matter for debate. The minister can make his contribution in the regular way. I recognize the hon. member for Mackenzie.

Mr. Korchinski: I accept the minister's comment, Mr. Chairman, but I assure the committee that the burden of our studies in the agricultural committee during the last few years has been to the effect that the minister did