

*Relocation of Railway Lines*

involved in this regard, particularly in respect of whether such shared cost programs should be initiated.

When we give authority to the CTC and a fairly heavy bank account, I think members of this chamber are quite justified in asking for some reassurance by way of action. We want some demonstrated reason for placing our trust in the ability of the CTC to administer, and I must say that my experience is such that I cannot help but be anything but concerned.

I suppose many examples could be given of this experience. I think of another one in the Halifax urban area involving a problem in the constituency of my dear colleague, our distinguished Chairman this evening. This has to do with a rail commuter service. I would cite this example to underline my concern about whether the CTC is in fact capable. This involved a long and protracted process, still underway, in the establishment of a commuter service to serve the outlying area of my own metropolitan Dartmouth-Halifax riding. In this instance all that was sought was a rescheduling of certain existing rail services to provide the people with a much needed service. The railway companies said no, not unexpectedly, citing their own problems, in the details of which I am sure hon. members are not interested.

To say the least, the railway companies, in this case both the CN and CP, were not very anxious or willing to do anything on their own and, accordingly, the citizens, with their somewhat impressive concern about this commuter service, presented a petition to their member of parliament. It eventually came across my desk and I wrote to the CNR, which again said no.

● (2120)

I then wrote to the Dominion Atlantic Railway which operated part of the commuter service on the tracks, and the reply I received was the same. They said they were merely a subsidiary of CPR and that since the terminal facility belonged to the CNR they could do nothing, that their hands were tied. I then addressed myself to the Minister of Transport, who in turn shuffled me off to the Canadian Transport Commission. He did so without any comment at all, I suppose believing I would flounder there.

On January 28 this year I addressed myself to the Chairman of the CTC and asked if he could advise me of the progress to date. That letter has not been answered to this point in time, April 25. Hon. members with longer memories will remember with some interest the contribution made in this chamber by a former member from Hamilton West who has since departed to a committee of the CTC. I believe he has been elevated to the position of executive director of the committee.

Mr. Macaluso, in a letter written to me over a month ago, advised me that studies in respect of this commuter service were underway but that no progress could be reported. I called his office this afternoon and the response was that there was still no word. Apparently the railway companies have not seen fit to answer the committee. So obviously the railway companies no longer tread in any fear of the CTC and feel they have successfully captured the commission.

[Mr. Forrestall.]

This tale of frustration and indecision would seem to me after having been in this chamber some years, to be typical of the incompetence of the government. In addition, I am by no means convinced that the commission itself is being chaired, as it is in a sense by another of our former colleagues, in a manner that in any way demonstrates any concern, or indeed any desire, to accept the responsibilities charged to the commission under existing legislation, let alone any ability to deal efficiently with this new legislation. The inescapable conclusion I suppose one might draw from this is that the government in a sense lost the initiative to assist, let alone sustain, the CTC, which is being asked to exercise considerable authority under this particular bill.

I suggest that the apathy has spread to various other commissions and agencies. There would appear to be a lack of leadership and drive. There is frustration over the difficulty of obtaining simple things or getting things done for people, and yet when asking us to accept what is essentially a long overdue piece of legislation the government also asks us to give powers to a body whose chairman, and perhaps even the other members, should be fired.

With new blood on the commission perhaps it might be stirred up and we might get a little action. I suggest we will not get such action under the present system. I cannot even get an answer after 18 months in respect of a simple matter like a commuter service or the reason that a train schedule cannot be altered by five minutes in order to accommodate thousands of families who live in a very rapidly growing area, albeit not the largest area of Canada but a healthy and growing area.

I do not wish to wander from the subject matter before us and cover other areas, but there are a number of other matters which have been touched on by the hon. member for Abitibi and by my hon. friend from Vancouver Island, who spoke about planning priorities and so on. I do note that in virtually every phrase in the bill there is some reference to the convenience and safety of the travelling public.

I would be somewhat remiss if I did not direct another shot at the minister, not necessarily the minister who is guiding this bill through the House, in respect of safety and the assurance that Canadians must have in respect of their transportation facilities. This is the assurance that institutions such as parliament owe to the people who use the transportation system. I refer to the regulatory body which investigates accidents within the parameters of its regulatory authority. Here we are giving more authority to the CTC to administer a fund that will be established, yet we do not consider the other aspects. I suggest, and I believe other members in this chamber share my view, that there is nothing in the performance of the CTC to warrant any confidence in it with regard to the administration of this particular bill.

The requirement in respect of public inquiries is a permissive thing under this legislation. We might have wished the minister had provided within the bill a means by which the public at large could perhaps, by the simple instrument of a petition to the CTC or other body, apply for a public hearing. I note that my colleagues to the left in this chamber would like that provision to be mandato-