

Government Orders

ny. I had hoped and for many years I had thought that this day would never come. I certainly did not expect it to come under the auspices of a Liberal government.

At times I felt if the Conservatives had been re-elected that at some point they would have done this. I remember back in 1978 when I was just a candidate for Parliament and had not yet been elected. I was critical of Harvie Andre, then a Conservative member of Parliament for Calgary for his proposal to privatize the CNR. I always thought that this was something in the back of the collective Conservative mind. The fact that it is happening now under a Liberal government to me simply makes the point—I wonder if the Bloc Quebecois could have their caucus meeting somewhere else, Mr. Speaker. I am trying to make a speech.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Order. Our colleague is seeking the co-operation of the House. I would ask those who wish to talk to do so outside the House if possible.

[English]

Mr. Blaikie: The fact that this is now happening under a Liberal government is proof positive to me of the consistency and the continuity of the corporate agenda which involves deregulation, privatization and free trade. I have to say that even I, and I have been here for a long time and know just how devious and how flexible shall we say the Liberal Party is, find the initiative taken by the government for the privatization of CN to be deeply surprising and deeply wounding.

In my own case, I do not think there is a person in my family for three generations who has not worked for the CNR at one time or another or worked there their entire life. That is true of a lot of people in my home town of Transcona where the main back shop for the CNR is.

• (1300)

I understand the position of the Bloc Quebecois in defending that part of the legislation which calls for the retention of Montreal as the location for the headquarters of the new privatized CN. However, I hope it will be equally understanding when it contemplates my anger that my community is not protected in the same way. Transcona is every bit as much a part of the history of the CNR as Montreal, going back to pre-CNR days when the shops began to be constructed in 1908 and 1909 around which the town of Transcona was created.

I object to the notion some people are protected by this legislation and others are not, that Montreal is protected; where the headquarters of the CNR is and will be is protected. Transcona's role in the life of the CNR is not protected. Presumably Transcona shops can be sold, cannibalized, balkanized, anything can happen to them. This legislation does not even acknowledge the existence of that place. Therefore I would like to register my objection to that.

I find it doubly insulting, offensive and tragic that not only is CN to be privatized but it could very well be sold to a variety of foreign interests. I see the solicitor general across the way. I remember being inspired when I was yet a high school student by the Gray report on foreign ownership of the Canadian economy. We have come a long way since then. We have come a long way since we hoped to repatriate elements of our economy that were under foreign ownership. Now we have a Liberal government, of which that same member is a member, privatizing and at the same time making it possible for foreign interests to own significantly Canadian National.

There is nothing in the bill to prevent the wholesale dismantling of the CNR or its being broken up into a number of fragments and sold off. I just finished reading this bill carefully and there is nothing in it to prevent an informal alliance of interests by which four or five American railways or other companies could buy 15 per cent each of the CNR and through that natural convergence of interests that does not fit any of the legal descriptions we find in the bill manipulate the future and the nature of the CNR to their own advantage in a way that may not be to the advantage of Canada.

Perhaps that is the point. Perhaps it is passé to talk about Canada. Perhaps it is passé to talk about making the economy or the marketplace accountable to something called the country or something called the public interest. Over time we have seen that notion erode and finally, I think with this bill, completely fall away so that voices like mine sound vaguely romantic or unrealistic in this context.

Nevertheless, I think I speak for a notion of the country which many people still cherish and which they regret seeing disappear as a result of this.

• (1305)

There is no provision in here for the future of VIA. It says the new CN can continue to charge VIA whatever it pleases. I would like to have seen something in here which would have demanded some accountability for what the new company would charge VIA. Is this to be the way VIA will disappear because the new company will charge VIA rates not tenable and therefore the next thing to go will be VIA? I would like not to have seen any of this but if it has to happen I would like to have seen consideration of the notion of having all the track in Canada owned by the government so that at least the government would continue to have a stake in our transportation system.

Finally, I believe none of this had to happen. I believe with the proper reregulation of our railway system the CNR and the CPR could have been healthy and viable. Instead, thanks to deregulation, thanks to imitating things happening south of the border we allowed ourselves to evolve to a point at which our railways are no longer viable.