

*Canadian National Railways and Air Canada*

rail transportation system, specifically in light of some of the priorities the CNR seems to be pursuing has turned this dream into a nightmare today. This is especially true of the activities of the CNR in eastern Manitoba.

What are some of the very real transportation problems facing Canada today? The first question that comes to mind is: Can the CNR provide a transportation system while, on the other hand, still involving itself in the provision of many ancillary services? To most Canadians the role of the CNR is seen as a second transcontinental railroad, built in the early part of the century to provide transportation in an area where the CPR was not able to provide that service. This area generally was north of the present CPR system.

During the last few weeks the whole concept of the transportation system of Canada has been seriously brought into question because the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) has stated very candidly that our rail transportation system is in a mess. Having said that, he also seems to have absolved himself from any responsibility or further action. I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that the transportation system of Canada is in a mess largely as a result of the non-policy of the present minister. In addition, we are in a mess often because of the priorities of the management of the CNR, whose priorities should be to provide transportation—to provide one facility, one service, and to do so well, forgetting all else.

Why do we not have a national transportation policy today? When will we get one, and how will it affect Canadians? The amendments moved by the hon. member for Mississauga (Mr. Blenkarn) are vehicles of protest which we can use to show that the priorities of our transportation system are all mixed up, that the main priorities are not being followed. I mentioned earlier that our national dream can, I think, be described more accurately today as our national nightmare, especially in western Canada. What is the situation in the west? At the present time we are 100 million bushels of grain short in export position. At present world prices we are looking at a loss or potential loss of half a billion dollars.

Let me comment on the block system, and in particular on what is known as Keewatin 61. How can I tell a grain farmer in my riding who wants to move his grain to market, "Hang on; the CNR won't buy any more rolling stock right now but the government will look after you", when at the same time we give the CNR clearance to spend money on hotels? These farmers have been locked into a position throughout the winter, trying to move their grain to plugged elevators. Grain cars have failed to arrive, and when they have arrived it has been because extreme pressure has been put upon the railways. The farmers are then given the word to load the cars because they will be picked up the next day, and as a result they work all night to ready the cars. Then, the following day they see the train go by without picking up these grain cars. For some three weeks loaded cars have been sitting on our sidings waiting to be moved while trains have been going by on open lines.

So again I ask, where are our priorities? How can I explain to farmers with commitments to meet that hotels are more important than boxcars? I think the motions of the hon. member for Mississauga bring that point out very

vividly. A protest is welling up in western Canada at our transportation system, and if hon. members do not believe that, all they have to do is to come to my riding. We have had to use every vehicle in an attempt to get the railways to return to their real priorities, the movement of goods and passengers. But the only action we have seen in my riding during the last few weeks was when we were able to convince the railways that we had a potential flood situation along the Red River valley, according to the Manitoba flood forecasting committee, and that grain presently in storage on farms would very likely be damaged or lost. How do you convince the people within the CNR system of the urgency of the situation, and that movement of goods should be their priority, not the building of hotels?

A second aspect of this national nightmare is the so-called disruption of passenger services by the CNR. We now have servo-centres; these are supposed to be the "in thing". For months I have been trying to get the officials of CNR to keep the campers special going in eastern Manitoba, but it always seems that the only way to do so is to apply pressure, to cajole, to use the public media to convince CNR that rail passenger service should also be part of their priorities.

It is very common in western Canada to see the following notice placed on Canadian National public notice boards:

Application for authority to remove the station agent and building at this location has been filed with the Canadian Transport Commission.

To most disinterested Canadians this notice would not mean too much. But to people living in rural towns who depend on rail service and on jobs, these notices very often spell disaster.

I should like to place on record part of a letter that I received from a constituent of mine concerning this whole question of priorities for the CNR. The letter is dated February 4, 1974 and relates to the movement of passengers by the CNR. It reads, in part:

Elma is a town of 300-400 people, 50 miles east of Winnipeg on the CNR main line. It is served by rail, and is also linked to several provincial highways. Industry—really none, unless you might call the CNR presence one. Although not special, it is typical of a rural town, which, through government action, is dying, by having its roots severed one by one.

From an economic sense the railway station probably does not add many dollars to Elma and district, but it still remains a location which provides these services to local and district citizens, no matter how small and inconsequential they may appear . . .

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It seems very ironic that we have provincial and federal policies reputedly to promote decentralization of industry and families, and supposedly stop urban glut and sprawl, while simultaneously we have federal Crown corporations and agencies, actively engaged in policies thwarting such schemes. How can a small rural town, such as Elma, ever hope to become a viable identity, when one of its props is to be removed?

The closing of the Elma station will certainly not make or break the CNR. In fact, what we may be doing is shifting the responsibility. The chain of events in closing a station, and shifting an agent, eventually means unemployment insurance or welfare payments for someone down the line. Good old John. Q. Public then picks up the tab.

Is it better to pay a man for not working, by implementation of closure, than to leave rail stations such as Elma open?

That is the question this constituent asks.