

The Address—Mr. Mayer

actual facts, the reason why they should remain in Canada with other Canadians to share with them a stronger and more united Canada, in short, to be really first-class Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I shall conclude with these remarks on Canadian unity. I was very proud when I first read the Speech from the Throne to realize that this Canadian government is meeting head on the various problems now facing us. I have dealt briefly with the various issues, Mr. Speaker, but I am very happy to speak in the House and tell my constituents that thanks to the Speech from the Throne, we will be able to prepare many pieces of legislation—some of which have already been introduced and adopted—to improve the lot of Canadians, Quebeckers and also, I hope, the people in my constituency of Lotbinière. That is why, Mr. Speaker, I endorse the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne, and give my unqualified support to the government of Canada.

[English]

Mr. Charles Mayer (Portage-Marquette): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure and a privilege for me to take part in this debate in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

I will start out, as many others have done, by congratulating Madam Speaker, through you, on her appointment. We have had a chance to see how she conducts the affairs of this House, and we all agree that she is going to be a first-class Speaker.

In addition, I would like to thank the constituents of Portage-Marquette for returning me here. I was first elected to the House of Commons in May of last year. I had the opportunity and the privilege to run as a candidate again and I was elected once more to represent the constituency of Portage-Marquette.

Portage-Marquette is a large rural riding in central Manitoba. It stretches approximately 15 miles east of Portage la Prairie all the way to the Saskatchewan border. It is over 200 miles in length. As I have said, it is a largely rural riding, Portage la Prairie being the largest city with some 15,000 people. It takes in a good many small towns which are and have been servicing agricultural communities, such as MacGregor, Austin, Carberry, Gladstone, Neepawa and Minnedosa. The riding stretches to the Saskatchewan border where we find towns such as Shoal Lake and Russell.

My riding is a great productive agricultural one. Not only are vegetables grown in the riding, but they are also processed at Portage la Prairie and Carberry. Many diverse crops are grown. We also find considerable livestock including both cattle and hogs. I thank the people of Portage-Marquette for seeing fit to return me here for a second term in this House of Commons.

Now I would like to talk a little about some of the items mentioned in the throne speech, specifically under the heading "Developing our Economic Potential". In that section there is a reference to agriculture. At this point I will quote from the Speech from the Throne. At page 6 of *Hansard* for April 14, 1980, the speech reads as follows:

My government regards the production, transportation, handling, and marketing of prairie grain as a national priority. Rail facilities will be upgraded, and port facilities improved.

This was welcome news in the throne speech, but unfortunately since that time a lot of things have happened which have been exactly opposite to maintaining and upgrading rail facilities. In this connection I refer specifically to an article which appeared in *The Brandon Sun* for Saturday, July 12, 1980. On the front page the article is headed "Reeve blames Liberals for loss of Miniota CP line". The first paragraph reads as follows:

Blanshard Reeve Frank McPhaden blames the re-election of the Liberals and not a last-minute appeal for the loss of the Miniota CP Rail subdivision.

This seems to me to be very strange when one reads the throne speech in which it says that rail facilities are going to be maintained.

Because we have such a large rural riding, grain transportation facilities, and rail facilities in particular, are extremely important to the riding of Portage-Marquette. Yet the reeve in my riding blames the Liberals for the loss of a rail line. That is only one line, namely the Miniota subdivision. It is a line that is in very good shape and it is made up of 85-pound steel. It is in about the same condition as some lines that are being upgraded. It would not entail very much maintenance, if any, to keep that line in operation and the Liberals are being blamed for the loss of the line.

In addition to that, there are several other branch lines in western Canada about which concern is being expressed for their survival because of statements which the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) has made. A month ago at a committee meeting on June 5, the Minister of Transport called into question the maintenance of some 30 branch lines which had been put into the permanent network by the previous minister of transport, the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski). Approximately 1,000 miles of these lines were put into the permanent network as a result of a study by the hon. member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Neil). This study was conducted during last summer and it resulted in the report which has come to be known as the Neil report. The then minister of transport acted upon that report and as a result, and through orders in council during the first week of January, approximately 60 per cent of the line at which the hon. member for Moose Jaw looked was put into the permanent network.

● (1510)

Since then, the future of these lines has been called into question. It is causing much concern to the producers in western Canada who, as a result of the orders in council, thought that this branch line issue had been settled. The Minister of Transport said at the committee meeting that he was not willing to accept the criteria on which the decision was made by the hon. member for Vegreville to put those lines into the permanent network. This to me is a very unfortunate situation because what we have now is a case where the grain companies and the two railway companies involved, the CNR and the CPR, are now uncertain about the future of these lines.