

*Railway Act*

country. I think it should be remembered, when we are considering the issue of rail abandonment, that these same companies which are today seeking so industriously to abandon these lines for purely economic reasons, completely ignoring any social implications in the areas concerned, were at one time equally solicitous about procuring from the government of this country monopolies to run these lines.

I would remind the house that these railways were granted something which belonged exclusively to the people of Canada, namely monopolies to run lines, exclusive of other competition, in many cases, in the areas affected. I do not wish to introduce any political aspect into this discussion because there has been enough politicking in this house since the beginning of the twenty sixth parliament; but we know that some companies were granted considerable property, mining and mineral rights, and so on, belonging to the people of Canada, in consideration of building the railways. I think it should be remembered that the companies sought these exclusive monopolies from the people of Canada and used them for profit and considerable gain for many, many years. It is singular that when the cream was flowing the railways did not come and tell us how much cream they were getting from these lines. But when the cream got a little thin, and, in some cases, turned to skimmed milk, they came crying back to the people of Canada through the board of transport commissioners and, just as quickly as they could, they tried to get rid of those responsibilities which they had sought in the first place.

I have attended some of the hearings before the board of transport commissioners and, of course, the last thing the railways are concerned about at these hearings is the effect of rail abandonment on the social and economic life of the areas concerned. In fact, they will say promptly that this is not a pertinent issue. In my particular constituency, the west end of the great riding of Renfrew South was at one time a booming and thriving lumbering area. Of late years the prosperity of that area has suffered very considerably by reason of the depletion of the timber limits. As a result the railways did not make quite as much money there as they would like to make. They have been successful in the past few years in abandoning several of these lines and are now in the process of attempting to abandon the last line, the last avenue stretching by rail from the capital of Canada to one of Canada's great national resources, Algonquin park.

They now want to tear up the line between Barrys Bay and Whitney which will cut off the last access by rail between Canada's cap-

ital and this great national heritage. Their only reason for doing so is that they are not making enough money. I believe that the railways, being vast corporations concerned only with profits and not with the public benefit will, as private corporations often will, do almost anything that is required to gain their ends. On one occasion the unhappy situation developed of the railway consenting to attempt to run a line profitably for a period of a year and if they were not able to do so they were to be permitted then to abandon it.

The municipalities which had opposed abandonment of the line took the word of the railway in good faith and thought they would in fact attempt to refurbish it, provide a better and more efficient service, advertise, and honestly attempt to make the line pay. Such was not our experience. The railway deliberately and as a matter of planned policy set out not to make money in that year, and to do everything as poorly as they possibly could in order that they might come back to the board a year later and say: "There you are; we told you so; we cannot make it pay; we want to abandon the line."

The railways will make no attempt, as businesses in competitive spheres must do, to make these lines pay and to make them effective and efficient. If they decide the line does not make money easily their attitude is: "Let us get rid of it; let us fold it; never mind the effects on the localities and on the people." I suggest that any corporation that has had a monopoly from the people of Canada and has milked it for all it was worth when the cream was good has no right to abandon a line to the detriment of the people in the locality, without making very adequate compensation to the people there for the abandonment of the line.

The hon. member who proposed the bill has taken a step in this direction and, as I said earlier, I think he is to be complimented and highly commended for this step. I wonder whether he has gone far enough. In hearing his well presented and documented speech I wondered whether it would not be advantageous to the people in these areas and more proper, in view of the fact that the railways have used these lines which were very largely granted from the public domain, if the railway when it wished to abandon a line would have to return the right of way to the public domain. I wonder how many applications for railway line abandonment we would have if the railways were told: "That is fine; you can abandon the line if it is in the public interest of the locality, but if you do so any land—"