

Freight Rates Reduction Act

break the back of the shippers while the government were awaiting the report of the MacPherson commission.

We are going to have an all-embracing railways transportation policy. What is suggested by the commissioners is a very revolutionary solution and it creates tremendous changes in the industry itself. We must remember that in Canada we have 89,000 different freight rates. That figure gives you an idea of what the problem is. I am quite satisfied that this resolution and the following bill will help in the solution of this problem which we have inherited and which we definitely wish to settle.

Mr. Peters: We are very pleased to hear the minister say now that an over-all transportation policy is to be introduced at this session of parliament. I believe he is for the first time being very optimistic in making the suggestion, particularly when he says that the bill is not ready for presentation because of several things that he assumes may or may not come to pass. The fact that he makes a suggestion and also that the throne speech this year made mention of some solution to the transport problem in general as it flows from the MacPherson report is certainly something worth while to look forward to.

Before we pass this legislation I believe we should have had some indication of what the solution is to be and I would think seriously, as an interim program, there should be a reassessment of this particular act. We were told in 1958 that this was an interim report. It was a report to help subsidize the wages where the railways were asking for an increase in their freight revenues to cover a wage increase. However, Mr. Chairman, I have not yet heard how much of an increase was necessary to put the conciliation report of that day into effect and how much the reduction in the staff of the railways in Canada has resulted in a decrease in the labour and the wage costs to the railway. I believe that this decrease has been very substantial.

I am always shocked when I talk to railroad people who have no interest whatsoever in the future of the railways because they are being completely disillusioned by the fact that they are working for an agency, whether it be the C.P.R. or the C.N.R., the continued existence of which is not certain. I have asked a large number of employees how long they have worked on the railroads, particularly those who told me they had just returned from a long period of unemployment. I find that many of them have seniority ratings of 8 years, 10 years, 11 years and 12 years. I suggest that people who have worked in an industry for that length of time and who

are finding themselves subject to long and costly lay-offs will no doubt find that their morale, as far as their employer is concerned, is very limited and that their feeling towards that industry is much less sympathetic than it has been.

If the minister came before us and told us that there was some desire to integrate the services being provided by all the railways in Canada, that the elimination of some of these railways would be considered, that we should be able to give to the workers of Canada an assurance that those who were left in the railway industry would be assured of jobs for a considerable period of time so that some stability would be brought to those people then I would be agreeable to voting for this interim extension that is brought before us today. These are not small sums of money, Mr. Chairman. It seems to me that if we paid the workers who are going to be laid off anyway these large sums of money, we could have them on the government payroll whether they worked for the railways or not. This might prove to be a much more sensible way. It seems to me that any government that fails to realize the problem that has developed in this country because of the two lines duplicating services and as the hon. member for Skeena pointed out, in some cases not duplicating them but shifting them on to another railway, is only bringing us closer to the day when a decision of a very drastic nature is going to have to take place.

When I read the reports of the proceedings of the committee I am always surprised at the way in which the president of Canadian National Railways deals with the other aspects of railroading involving the truck companies the railway has bought, the contracts they let to private trucking concerns and the operations of the trucking agencies that they own, lock, stock and barrel. He always says that they have not been in this business long enough to find out how the rates for this type of service compare with their other methods of transportation and whether or not this trucking venture has been a success.

We have a responsibility to the Canadian people, Mr. Chairman. It is quite all right to say that we will provide this subsidy now on an interim basis and come to some solution later. But this has been going on for a long time now and I will tell the Canadian people that they are not going to gain anything in the transportation field by going back to the party that was in power in this country for many years. With a minority government it seems to me that there is a wonderful opportunity now for the government to sit