

Canadian National Railways

opportunity to communicate and to move about more freely in the colony. The railway was a very important facility. I am alarmed that 70 or 80 years later, when we have become a part of this great Canadian nation, a decision has been made and has been upheld by this government and by the Canadian Transport Commission to abandon this vital rail passenger service in Newfoundland. Our province, as most hon. members will recall, is sparsely populated. We have a very severe climate and, I might say, lots of snow. I make this point because the Canadian National intends, as my colleague pointed out, to replace the passenger train service with buses.

I must say that my colleague, the hon. member for Grand Falls-White Bay-Labrador, did an excellent job of describing the type of bus, the air conditioning, etc. Can you imagine, though, buses travelling right across Newfoundland, a distance of some 600 miles, under the most severe conditions imaginable and sometimes through a barren wilderness stretching in excess of 100 miles where in many places you see no sign of human life. There would be 39 passengers, men, women and children, crammed in that bus plowing its way along the trans-Canada highway in Newfoundland. It must be recalled that our trains have been blocked by snow in that area for as long as 70 hours. This is not too bad on a train where you can move around, where you have a dining car and so on. However, can you imagine people being stranded on an ordinary passenger bus for that length of time? I am suggesting that this will happen as sure as we are in this house today. It might not happen this winter but it certainly will happen, and it will happen on many occasions.

God forgive me for saying this, and I do not wish anything ill for anybody, but I should like to see the president of Canadian National and the former member of this house, Jack Pickersgill, come to Newfoundland and take a ride on that bus. Again, God forgive me, but I would not mind seeing them stuck for a few hours. I know such a thing should not happen to anybody, but if there is anybody in Canada who deserves that to happen I would highly recommend to the man above that these two or three men should be given top priority.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Jack would not freeze; he jumps around too much.

Mr. Carter: Well, at \$40,000 a year he can afford to jump around. I will give him credit for one thing; he knew when to leave Bonavista-Twillingate.

Getting back on a serious note, Mr. Chairman, I point out that while there may not be—this is debatable—a constitutional obligation on the part of the government to maintain our passenger service, in my opinion there is most definitely a moral obligation. In recent years in Newfoundland we have had a number of commissions set up to investigate transportation problems. There was the MacPherson commission on transport as well as the Newfoundland transportation commission. Both—I repeat both—recommended the upgrading of the rail service. It might be of interest to note, and I hope hon. members opposite will do so, that neither report recommended abandonment. I repeat that these two commissions, headed by highly qualified people, were well aware and quite familiar with the conditions that exist in Newfoundland and they recommended that the rail service be upgraded. They did not recommend that it be abandoned.

The irony of the situation is that, despite these royal commissions, the Canadian National has adopted the opposite policy. Some years ago the Canadian National deliberately set about downgrading the Newfoundland rail passenger service in order to discourage its use by the travelling public. Naturally this policy resulted in yearly losses, substantial losses some years. Of course, this fact was used to strengthen the argument of Canadian National in favour of abandoning the rail passenger service. The argument Canadian National is using is based on the fact that in 1966, I believe it was, Canadian National lost \$916,000. This was a deliberate loss. If this is going to be the yard-stick C.N.R. will use in the future, then how many rail services will be allowed to continue? If I am wrong, I stand to be corrected, but I do not know of any service that is really making money. I am sure the loss of \$916,000 on the Newfoundland service is not as heavy as other losses incurred on other rail services.

● (3:10 p.m.)

Canadian National's plan to steal our passenger service from us was a very well calculated one. Several years ago they commenced to downgrade the service, to take away from the Newfoundland people things to which we were accustomed. For example, we had a reasonably good dining car and, as