

*Railway Act*

with it at all? In fact I do not think I will offend him if I say that was the attitude of the Conservative party before the committee. We in the province of Alberta think there is a great principle involved in this bill, and we want to see it passed. We know it is not equalization, but we have been suffering from an unjust, unfair and criminal discrimination for the last forty years. Now the Minister of Transport has introduced this bill, and I want to congratulate him. It was a big step to take, especially in view of the criticism he will receive from the official opposition. I believe he is to be commended for taking this step.

When this railway problem came to the fore in Canada, Mr. Chairman, the attack upon it was spearheaded by the province of Alberta, and later by Saskatchewan, Manitoba and even British Columbia. Finally they all agreed that it would be better to have our freight rates problems solved by a royal commission investigation than by submitting the difficulties to the board of transport commissioners. The government agreed with that view and set up a royal commission. When the royal commission was set up and it did not go according to the plans of some of those who had advocated the setting up of the commission, they raised their hands in horror and said, "We do not want this; we would rather trust the board of transport commissioners." Then when it came to improving the board of transport commissioners by increasing their salaries and creating a better board in accordance with the terms of the resolution passed a while ago, the opposition said, "No, leave it the way it was; we do not want it any better." Certainly they do not, because of the advantages they have obtained from the decisions of an overworked and inefficiently staffed board.

We do not take that view at all. We believe that the board should be strengthened and the members given decent wages, even though they be lawyers. This will put the board in a position to make an extensive inquiry into these difficulties, and arrive at a fairer decision. For a moment I should like to read from the royal commission report. All the contending parties agreed that there should be a royal commission. This commission went into the problem thoroughly and brought down a report, and the government have implemented the recommendations of that commission in the legislation which is before us now. Let us see what the report says about some of the problems confronting Alberta. Every province had an opportunity of setting forth their criticisms, and they did—except Ontario and Quebec. These two

provinces believed they were in a preferred position because they had water and truck transportation. They did not care what was done, because those two modes of transportation would keep the freight rates down. British Columbia has water rates which it is said should be used to keep their freight rates down. We, therefore, are between the devil and the deep sea, British Columbia and Ontario. They say to us, you fellows in the prairie provinces should be satisfied. You are going to get your throat cut anyway, so which one do you want to cut it, British Columbia or Ontario? That is about the proposition they are putting to us. They believe we are going to sit down and take it. Thank God there is not a Conservative government in power or that is what we would get. As much as I dislike the Liberals, in this case at least they have gone a long way by introducing this legislation.

After a thorough investigation, these are some of the problems the royal commission found were facing the people of western Canada. At page 100 of the report we find this:

As long as the competition exists the railways should be permitted to meet it. But when meeting the competition creates anomalies of the character indicated above and causes such long standing grievances, it is desirable that a solution be found which will enable the railways to meet the competition and at the same time eliminate, at least to a substantial degree, the anomalies created.

On the same page, under the heading "Recommendations", the report states:

On the main issue, it seems reasonable to conclude that when the railways give the trader and consumer at the Pacific coast the benefit of fast railway service at rates that are very little more than ocean rates and thus provide them with two alternative services at almost the same price, the consumers in Alberta and other intermediate provinces are entitled to share in an equitable degree in the beneficial condition thus created by the railways.

Surely no intelligent person would contradict that statement. Then, the report continues:

The influence of any transcontinental rate from the east to British Columbia coast should be carried back in the rates to the intermediate provinces (including points in British Columbia east of the coast) on a basis not more than one-third greater than the transcontinental rate to the seacoast. This is a logical and simple solution to the matter, one which is readily calculated and applied; it recognizes the influence on Alberta of intercoastal competition, but at the same time does not lead to the extreme conclusion that Alberta should have seacoast rates.

A little further on the report states:

The provinces east of Alberta will likewise benefit from the proposal which is outlined above, since the maximum rate to all points between the point of origin and the Pacific coast area will be subjected to the ceiling of 133½ per cent of the transcontinental rate.