

*Canadian National Railways*

immediate added cost is put on the public in the form of providing highways that are capable of handling the increased traffic load. Also, additional aircraft flights are required. I submit that it is absolutely unrealistic to compare the number of people who can be handled efficiently by air with the number who can be transported at this particular time along our roads and rail lines.

I have had experience of applications made to the railway commission when so-called uneconomic passenger line abandonments are up for consideration. I am sure that everyone in this house realizes that the slide rule artists are quite capable of changing a profit into a loss. Sometimes even a royal commission is unable to controvert the statements of these experts. I listened to a statement made by one expert in this field who told me that whether I wanted to show a profit or a loss he could give me what I wanted with the same set of figures. I am sure that anyone who has attended this sort of hearing appreciates the situation when he tries to figure out cost equations for this particular segment of the economy.

The communities of this nation are being hard hit to maintain viable economic units. We have recently seen many post office facilities closed down because of the stated policy that there should be a minimum of 30 families to warrant revenue post offices. No consideration appears to be given to the social elimination of post offices, just as it is true that no consideration is being given to the impact of the abandonment of passenger services and branch lines.

● (12:30 p.m.)

During the post office debate the question was raised whether the railways had asked to be relieved of the handling of revenue postal mail had the government itself suggested that the railways change their facilities and methods of transportation. The answer given was that, naturally, the railways had not asked to be relieved of the handling of that mail. Yet there must be a relationship between the social and economic needs of a community.

In C.N.R. financing matters and problems such as these must be given priority as it is our responsibility in this house to ensure that communities, which mean people, are given prior consideration. I am given to understand that at this very time a large staff is employed in preparing applications for the abandonment of branch lines and passenger services throughout Canada.

I refer now to page 49 of the annual report of the Department of Transport for 1966-1967, "Transportation Policy and Research":

It was formed to undertake economic and technical research into all modes and forms of transportation; to assist in the development and formulation of transportation policies; and to advise on legislation in all fields of transportation. The branch is staffed by a group of professionals with training in the fields of economics, statistics, commerce, geography, business administration and engineering, with experience in railway, shipping, trucking, and air line companies.

I wonder whether any sociologists have been engaged by the department for this in depth study of the resultant consequence of any passenger train abandonment and/or branch line abandonment. I am certain we realize that an economist concerns himself with the best means of attaining a given end. He cannot concern himself with the social problems, nor with the end results of what effects abandonments will have on the people themselves.

A good example of this situation exists at the present time in the province of Newfoundland. No one needs to remind the house that it is the intention of the railway company to abandon the only passenger service in Newfoundland, trains 101 and 102. We have a responsibility to ensure that this passenger service is not eliminated. Surely, in the financing of this railway company and its affiliates, money must be allocated for necessary services. I do not know where else in Canada it is as absolutely necessary to retain and maintain a passenger service adequate to serve the needs of our citizens as in Newfoundland. This government will stand accused in the eyes of every man, woman and child in that province if they allow this cancellation of rail service to go through, and I think it is past time for this crown agency to accept its responsibility and to stop acting as a free swinging, corporate elite.

Another point of some concern to me is the discharging of obligations incurred by the C.N.R. I am certain that the minister must be aware of the claims made against the C.N.R. by certain contractors who were involved in the construction phase of the Great Slave Lake railway. It is a fact that the hon. member for Selkirk has made attempts to have this matter cleared up. He suggested that no additional sums of money should be allocated for any new branch line until some answers are received as to the manner in which C.N.R. engineers enforced contract provisions which resulted in many contractors being forced into bankruptcy on the construction phase of