

Branch Railway Lines

suggest the technique of co-operative work with the provincial governments of the three prairie provinces would yield tremendous dividends.

We set the pattern in January, 1963. There has been great concern and uncertainty since because, so far as we know, they have never been consulted since. Occasionally we get from them these expressions of concern. These meetings that have been held in various parts of Manitoba and Saskatchewan during this last year and a half are indicative of the fact that the concern is widespread in these provinces. I would suggest very strongly, not only to the Minister of Transport but more particularly to the minister who is to be in charge of this rationalization program, that they frequently communicate with the governments of these three prairie provinces.

No matter how you twist and turn, no matter how you rationalize the abandonment of any of these lines there are people there who have spent a lifetime—two generations in some cases—building up the social capital of their churches, their sidewalks, their sewage systems, their water systems, their curling rinks and all the other things that make up the social capital of a community. Take a railway out of one of these towns and you may destroy the economic base of that community—

The Chairman: I have to interrupt the hon. member to ascertain if he has the unanimous consent of the committee to go beyond his time limit.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Hamilton: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I shall not trespass too far on the good will of the committee, as I think I can finish my remarks in five or six minutes. I am trying to make the point that here you have a large number of people who, rightly or wrongly, are in a certain spot and they have invested all they own in this social capital, as well as in the private ownership of their homes. At this moment I am not including in my concern the great grain companies who invested hundreds of millions of dollars in grain handling facilities, as they can look after themselves fairly well in this type of tug of war. But I am speaking, with all the feeling I can put into my words, for these small merchants and craftsmen in the towns, who have built these conveniences to supply the people around them, all because there was a railway going through their towns.

Having said that I know there are other cases involved. In fact one happened in my

[Mr. Hamilton.]

constituency in 1961 when 122 miles of railway line were abandoned. I joined with the hon. member for Moose Mountain and the hon. member for Brandon-Souris in trying to get the people of that area, if they wanted to preserve their railway, to join with us in collecting information and promising certain things to convince the railway that the line should be kept there. But the businessmen had to tell us they could not take their business and hand it back to the railway, because of the time factor in modern merchandising.

Likewise, when I took the case of two or three of the communities involved to the railways to suggest that a spur line be built by the C.N.R. into the areas abandoned by the C.P.R., they were able to show that the figures of maintaining and servicing these spur lines were greater than the cost of trucking goods. Therefore we dropped our opposition. The rail line was abandoned, but I am compelled to say that these particular towns we were worried about are equal to or stronger than they were before the lines were abandoned. However the situation in that case was that the other railway was only two or three miles away, and there was no loss to the farmers. People kept coming to these communities to curl, go to church and do their business. In that particular case the abandonment of the line did not cause any harm to the social capital I have been talking about and actually it improved the economics of the two railway lines north and south.

If we are willing to look into these problems of going into an area and taking out railway lines that may well possibly have been built in the wrong places 60 years ago, if we are willing to add up the assets as well as the liabilities, then I am sure westerners will be willing to be the first to agree to a railway line being taken out, as long as the suffering or loss is not so severe that it destroys the livelihood of the people in those areas. No matter how you turn and twist there are going to be areas where the taking out of a line is not going to be serious; but equally there are areas, and I think a majority of them, where the losses will be beyond the recovery of the private individual. In these areas where losses will be beyond the individual's ability to cope with, where the small businessman, the clerks in a town, small craftsmen and, in some cases, groups of farmers, will be completely isolated, then I think governments have to accept something more than just the ordinary type of commiseration. We are going to have to do something definite, and there are many practical