

*Canadian National Railways*

Canadian National has at least made an attempt to modernize and upgrade its service. But anyone seeking to go out west on one of the national lines will have great difficulty in obtaining sleeping accommodation. Reservations must be made two or three weeks in advance. Often you are turned down and, in desperation, you seek some other mode of travel. Neither the Board of Transport Commissioners nor this government apparently realizes what is going on when companies ask to have services discontinued. I know of instances where people who could not obtain accommodation on train had as a last resort to take an airplane, a bus or their own car. I can therefore understand the complaints which have been raised, since it seems that other provinces are having the troubles our own province suffers from.

I suggest that rail passenger service has a future in this country. Many people like to travel in a leisurely way and see this great country. If they were assured of reliable service, and accommodation at all times I am sure we should see a sharp upward trend in the number of passengers using trains. The people of British Columbia have never been too happy with this country's national transport policies. Nothing needs to be overhauled so much in this country as our national transport policies, which direct our various systems of transportation. Perhaps I might be permitted to speak of freight rates. The people of British Columbia feel that in the matter of freight rates they are grossly discriminated against. The tendency has been for British Columbia trade to be driven north or south, and particularly south, rather than to the east. Many Canadian markets are barred to products from British Columbia because of the excessively high freight rates charged.

● (4:50 p.m.)

It seems to me this is one of the first markets which any government should look to and encourage. I know that the province has gone to the federal government and to the Board of Transport Commissioners on numerous occasions with good cases for freight rate assistance, and the need for changes in the old freight rate structure. This is a field in which the house should be keenly interested.

I want to point out that once passenger service lines are abandoned, abandonment of the freight lines is often the next step. This has happened in the area from which I come. Passenger service is discontinued, then comes an application to discontinue freight services to the rural areas. The first thing we know is

[Mr. Harding.]

that a number of small rural industries go out of business. Here we are talking about an incentive program to build up the regions where there is a low level of income and employment, without fully realizing that one of the keys to the whole situation is transportation. If we are to build up industry in some of our rural sections, transportation is one of the keys to a successful program.

I urge the government to take another look at transportation as it affects the rural areas, because this has been overlooked in the past and it is bound to affect our efforts to encourage industry to locate in some of these less favoured areas, in order to bring a higher standard of living to those who live and work there.

Time is drifting on, and there is one more point I should like to make before I sit down. It concerns the air service to the Kootenay country. This is another example of the erosion of transportation services in some sectors of this nation. C.P.A. presently serves the Kootenay area and there is talk of withdrawing service from the Castlegar district. I presume this will apply to the Okanagan, and perhaps, to the east Kootenays, too. If such action is taken, smaller companies will no doubt move into the district; but in the overall picture our transportation facilities are gradually being reduced and this reduction is bound to have detrimental effects on the area. I suggest to the house that this whole question of air transport, rail transport and road transport be looked into with a view to modernizing the system. These services can be integrated to a far greater extent than they are today.

It seems a tragic thing to me that Canada should have two transcontinental railways, each having trouble getting a sufficient volume of traffic to make its operations pay. Often we see the companies operating fleets of trucks in direct competition with their own rail lines. Often we see highways clogged with trucks carrying goods which could, quite possibly, be carried by railway waggons which are operating only at half capacity. This subject should be explored fully by the department, by the government and by this house. Surely we can improve on what we have.

There are a number of separate questions I should like to ask later, when another opportunity arises. I certainly sympathize with hon. members from Newfoundland and elsewhere who have spoken about the problems they are