

Supply—Transport

Mr. Nesbitt: They dissolve the railways, mostly.

An hon. Member: There is only one member of the board.

Mr. Peters: Somebody said there is only one member of the board. I thought there was more than that. They are called commissioners, and I should like to know what has happened to the other two. Perhaps they do not travel. I have been reading their recommendations and they certainly have not said anything that has impressed me with regard to passenger service. The decision they made in relation to the "Dominion" is no credit to them. They have said that things are going to change in 1967, so these things may have to be done all over again.

I really do not care if they get rid of the railways altogether—I say this sincerely to the minister—and put on road transport. I have not really been able to find out whether the Canadian public are subsidizing Smith Transport or the hauling of freight on Canadian Pacific, and I do not think anyone in this house is really aware of the breakdown with relation to the ownership of these road transport companies which the railways have incorporated.

One last question I should like to ask the minister is this. What is the matrimonial intention of Canadian National Railways with respect to Ontario Northland Railway? I notice that we have allowed Canadian National to send several of their senior officials to operate this railway. This will not do the railway any harm because in Ontario we have not been doing a very good job recently in regard to its operation. We have a commission made up of political appointments by the provincial government. This commission does not have any say in whether the workers can deal with their employer. The workers now find they must go to Toronto and deal with a department of government.

I had an opportunity of talking to one of these pseudo-Canadian National employees not long ago. He was of the opinion that he really was not dealing with the commission set up to administer Ontario Northland and that in terms of passenger traffic, freight, express and some of the other problems it was a matter of dealing with both Canadian National and the Ontario government directly in the capacity of an agency.

I believe the people of northern Ontario would like to know what the intention is in regard to this railway. If the railway is up for

[Mr. Nielsen.]

sale it would probably be a very lucrative buy for Canadian National if they intend to extend their operation. We have some excellent contracts there for hauling iron, pulp, paper and some other heavy commodities.

• (9:00 p.m.)

The railway needs some maintenance. Some new money could be put into expending branch lines to the iron ore properties that are being developed. The Ontario Northland, whether it is owned by the Ontario government or comes under the Canadian National, will need a terminal in our main city of Toronto. It is going to have to have some relationship with the other railways because of the passenger problem.

I suggest that if the minister really wants to do something, he could be open and above-board on this matter and indicate to members of parliament whether or not he really intends to have a committee look at passenger service across Canada. If he does not, the railways themselves will get rid of rail lines. When passengers find that they are unable to get reservations a week ahead of time or that the two crack trains that are running now are booked a month in advance, they will no longer be rail passengers, but will find alternative means of transportation. The railways will be able to get rid of passengers and passenger service in this way.

If this is the end result that the minister wants, all he has to do is sit quietly and do nothing about it. If I can judge the temper of the speeches made by members in this house, then I think a decision will have to be made by the minister which will not make it necessary to repeat these arguments when the new estimates come before us. Surely the Canadian public have indicated, through their members, that they want a passenger policy, and that this policy is not going to come from the Transport Commissioners but from parliament. We are really going to have to make a decision whether we are going to buy the Canadian Pacific or let them go out of the passenger business. We will have to decide if we are going to do something about subsidizing or upgrading Canadian National passenger service or whether we want to get out of that business and go into air transport. This is a large country. There is no question but that air transport could be the answer in many cases.

I think the country is anxiously awaiting a policy decision. I hope the minister will give us an indication he is going to make a very blunt decision that will decide the future of