

Transportation of Dangerous Goods

tee as soon as possible where, hopefully, many worth-while improvements can be made.

Apart from this legislation is the fact that existing rules and regulations, although inadequate, are not being enforced. The Railway Act gives the Canadian Transport Commission power to prescribe regulations of safety for the transportation by rail of dangerous products. The CTC is charged with responsibility to ensure the best possible safety of railways, regardless of whether dangerous goods are on board or not. The CTC has not been able to carry out that duty, partly because of this government's and the previous Liberal government's mindless restraint program.

Edgar Benson, president of the Canadian Transport Commission, testified before the House of Commons transport committee that their budget prevented them from hiring enough safety inspectors. I quote:

The people we have I think do a pretty good job based on the numbers we have spread across the country, which I think is something like 78, which bothers me. It probably should be 178 instead of 78.

Mr. John Magee, commissioner of the CTC, further testified at a later committee meeting that Treasury Board was asking the CTC to reduce its staff even further:

—the man-year allotment of the railway transport committee in 1977-78 was 260 persons. This was reduced in 1978-79 to 246 persons. It was reduced for 1979-80 to 239 persons. And we now have a directive from the Treasury Board within the past week to cut 100 persons of the staff of the Canadian Transport Commission. Incidentally, the reduction in the staff of the RTC out of the 100 will be from 239 to 225.

We do not need an inquiry to tell us that the budget cutbacks must be lifted and the CTC must be permitted to expand its staff of railway inspectors, now.

The action today is a partial recognition of the fact that something can be done previous to the outcome of the inquiry and passage of this legislation. There are certainly more actions that could be taken, many of which were ably listed by the hon. member for Stormont-Dundas as interim measures.

If we, as parliamentarians, move to pass this legislation, to increase our responsibility as legislators, and if the government lives up to its responsibility by revoking the cutbacks, and increasing the budget of the CTC, surely we should expect some improvement in the performance of the carriers themselves.

The railway companies in this country are chartered to provide a service to the public of Canada. One of those companies, CN, is owned by the people of Canada, and there is no question that it should be responsible for the safety of the public. The other company, the Canadian Pacific, which has been paid for several times over by the taxpayer through land grants, cash grants, ongoing subsidies and the deferral of \$679 million in taxes owing, has a responsibility as well. But what have the railways done? Between 1957 and 1977 they laid off 31,000 road and equipment maintenance employees, a policy which directly affected safety.

More particularly, let us look at the CPR. In 1978 the company spent 35.6 per cent of its revenue on maintenance. In

[Mr. Blaikie.]

1936, at the height of the depression with low traffic and profits, the CPR spent just as much—34 per cent of revenues.

The CPR did not have hot box detectors on the heavily travelled portion of rail line through Mississauga. Now it is telling the people of Mississauga that if they wish to receive compensation for their very pressing and immediate needs caused by evacuation, they must give up their right of action for further compensation. Mr. Speaker, blackmail by any other criminal would not be permitted in this society. Why should the people of Canada, who paid for the CPR in the first place, put up with this treatment?

While improving railway safety and federal legislation can reduce accidents involving dangerous goods, it cannot eliminate them. Realization that there is a threshold above which accidents involving dangerous goods cannot be reduced has prompted discussion of the whole question of our dependence upon non-renewable materials. Our traditional sources of fibres and household goods such as leather, cotton and wood, which were labour intensive, have been replaced by synthetic goods and fibres which are extracted from non-renewable hazardous substances or which require dangerous chemicals for their manufacture. Like the energy crisis, the dangerous products crisis cannot be approached in practical terms alone but must also be seen as a crisis of lifestyle and of the technology we employ.

We depend too greatly on synthetic materials and on non-renewable resources, for our way of life, both of which are often dangerous, even when not in transit. Only by reducing our dependence on such substances in the first place will we actually approach a satisfactory solution. Too often a technological solution to a technological problem misses the real problem. We shall see.

Mr. Speaker, we look forward to the day when the intention of this bill is fulfilled by the development of the regulations it proposes to set up. The true measure of this bill's worth will be tested not here in Parliament but in the field where the adequacy or otherwise of the regulations eventually developed will, in time, be revealed. We shall expect to have a clear idea of what those regulations are to be before we extend our present co-operative mood through to royal assent to this bill. In a speech made earlier in this House the Minister of Transport complained that the previous government did not consult sufficiently with industry. We should be watching to see that consultation with industry does not mean accommodation to industry. In this connection we can only watch the regulations.

We look forward to working in committee, determining an approach which would ensure, as far as possible, the safe transport of goods within Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to extend unduly this debate because I agreed with the government House leader to—

An hon. Member: Oh, oh!