

in and take them. We will worry later about the bookkeeping and the paying for it. They could use these goods in such a fashion that all of their system would be utilized to the maximum.

In addition to that, I would suggest that we in North America particularly have some expertise in setting up distribution systems or transportation systems that might be useful to them. I expect that they do not even have enough highway trucks and that sort of thing at the present time, so I think we could be helpful in that area as well.

Honourable senators, I have not been back to the Soviet Union since then, but we did spend quite a lot of time particularly around the two big cities that I mentioned. There are some very practical things that we take for granted here in North America that could now be helpful to the people of the Soviet Union because of the collapse of the communist-dominated structure that had existed there before.

Senator Carney: Why not convey your experience? You are a farmer. You are a former Minister of Agriculture. You have been to Russia recently. Have you thought of submitting to the minister some concrete suggestions on how this could be done? I am sure she would very much appreciate input at this time.

Senator Olson: I would be very glad to do that. I thought I tried to do that on October 29 and again today. In order to give some advice on the practical applications of the services that would be necessary, obviously you need to have some expertise on the ground and to see what is missing in Odessa and in St. Petersburg and all the other places. Then we do what we can and get what help we can from the G-7 nations to replace and augment the efficiency of what is there.

On motion of Senator Bosa, debate adjourned.

● (1640)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS

STANDING SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS AUTHORIZED TO INQUIRE INTO DECISION TO SELL RAIL LINE

Hon. B. Alisdair Graham, pursuant to notice of Tuesday, December 10, 1991, moved:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications be empowered to inquire into and report upon the decision of Canadian National Railways to sell the main railway line between Truro and Sydney, Nova Scotia; and

That the Committee present its Report no later than April 14, 1992.

He said: Honourable senators, perhaps I could say a few words at this time. I know that Senator MacDonald, the Chairman of the Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications, would also like to participate, however briefly.

When I introduced this motion on December 9, I pointed out that the Truro-Sydney railway line is an active, living presence in Nova Scotia and that it is integral to the economic

life and future development of that region. We were assured by Senator MacDonald that a private operator could, in the likelihood of its sale, operate the line efficiently. Senator MacDonald told us that an effective entrepreneurial management would, "give a marginal line... one last chance of survival before abandonment occurs." CN, we were assured, would sell the railway to a buyer interested in establishing a viable feeder line, interested in protecting the rights of the workers, and so on. There are those of us even in this chamber, who might feel that those assumptions might be just a bit optimistic.

Honourable senators, this whole question of choice, placed in the hands of Canada's largest crown corporation, a corporation which Senator MacDonald has very astutely observed to be interested entirely in the operation of its main line, is not just about buyers and sellers. The Truro-Sydney line is absolutely vital to our region, to our local shippers, and as well it serves as the principal barrier to serious congestion and safety hazards on our roads.

Therefore we are not merely looking at the question of buyers and sellers. We are looking at the question of buyer and operator responsibilities. That buyer and operator responsibility is not just to the Syscos and the Devcos and the Stora Forest Industries of today, all of whom are shippers of the present to whom the line is a fundamental necessity. As I said when I spoke first on this motion, uncertainty with respect to the future of the line will seriously impair every effort to attract new business to the region.

I am talking here about investor confidence. For this reason, a stable operating presence is absolutely essential. Shippers and potential investors, and indeed ordinary people all over eastern Nova Scotia, are greatly affected by the present uncertainty; an uncertainty which is compounded by the fear of a transitional sale to an entrepreneurial organization whose sense of responsibility to regional interests in our part of the country is still an unknown factor.

As I said in this chamber two days ago, we do not have an adequate railroad/road balance in Nova Scotia, and the situation is deteriorating. This is not an area where the market alone can serve as a regulator.

Maritimers were subjected to deadly catch phrases like "railway rationalization" at the beginning of this century. We lost a great deal as a result. The greatest loss was felt by our people. The lesson we have learned is that our future equity in Confederation depends on eternal vigilance. The future will not wait on chance; the future will not be constructed on the underpinnings of luck and circumstances. The future must not be played out like a game of Russian roulette.

With regard to the sale of the Truro-Sydney line, it is clear that the government must play a pivotal role in the preservation and protection of the interests of the people. Our Canadian association must never be managed by principles of disinterest or casual divestment. Governments must undertake the complex bargaining needed to unequivocally protect and preserve our unique regional compact.