

National Transportation Policy

of occasions. Every time I was in that situation I heard the CPR at that time, through the man who is now president of the CPR, Mr. Ian Sinclair, tell the board and the unions how the CPR was losing money through loading and carrying grain. They used to calculate it into tens of millions of dollars or hundreds of millions of dollars over the years. I remember saying that if they were telling the truth then the CNR and the CPR ought really to be bankrupt instead of being very effective organizations, particularly the Canadian Pacific. The objection to the Crowsnest Pass rates and the calculations they make always are based on comparing the cents per ton mile that they get for carrying grain with the cents per ton mile that they get for carrying those commodities for which they charge much higher rates. That is a pretty false way to tell us they are losing money. That is why I do not accept the statement of the railways, repeated the other day by the minister, that the railways lose money carrying grain.

Sure, they do not make as much money carrying grain as carrying other commodities, but it is their duty to Canada to carry this grain at the Crowsnest Pass rates. Furthermore, when I study the history of the CPR in this country and transportation generally—I have not bothered to look up the details but I have a vivid memory of them—I find that when the agreement for the Crowsnest Pass rates was made with the railways the CPR received additional millions of dollars and additional millions of acres of land as a quid pro quo which enabled this outfit to become one of the largest economic empires in this country. But they forget what they got from the people of Canada and object to the Crowsnest Pass rates. If any one gives in to the CPR on this issue we will have betrayed not only the interests of the farmers in the west but also the interests of all the people of Canada.

● (1530)

The policy which Mr. Pickersgill shoved through parliament in 1967 gave the railways the possibility of entering upon a plan for wholesale rail abandonment. The consequences were disastrous for many communities. Of course, the railways could prove that certain routes, certain bits of line in various parts of Canada were, in themselves, unprofitable. In a country the size of Canada where only 22 million of us are scattered across an entire continent, a relatively smaller population being in the northern regions, of course there are railways lines which are unprofitable and which always will be unprofitable. But that should not be the only reason for permitting a course which not only takes away an essential service from people who deserve it but which has sounded the death knell for many communities.

I honestly sympathize with the minister because of the situation in which he now finds himself. He has to come before parliament, as well as tell the nation on radio and television, to say that there is not enough rolling stock to move all the grain and carry all the other bulk commodities, particularly from the west and from the north, which need to be delivered. And why? Because the railways have decided they can make more money in other ways than by purchasing hopper cars or whatever other cars are needed to serve the Canadian economy. Sir, the railways of this country were created by the people of this country and

[Mr. Lewis.]

they ought, by law, be made to provide adequate rolling stock.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: Everybody in this House is aware of the anomalies and discrimination which exists in the freight rate structure. I shall not take any of the relatively short time available to me by citing examples. I am sure that other members of my party, and other members of the House, will do so. But everybody knows how much cheaper it is to ship steers to central Canada than it is to ship processed meat. Everybody knows how much cheaper it is to ship rapeseed rather than rapeseed oil, how much cheaper it is to transport unprocessed raw materials from the north than it is to transport processed goods. This freight rate policy on the part of the railways means they have added another almost insuperable obstacle to the development of secondary industry in precisely those parts of Canada which require it most.

All these difficulties which the minister faces result, as he correctly states, from the fact that competition has never been possible as a basis for national transportation policy. Indeed, profit-making is immoral when applied to national transportation policy in a country such as Canada where transportation, just as much as energy, is the lifeblood of the economy. So my first point is this: we must consider the introduction of a policy which regards transportation as a public utility concerned not with alleged competition but concerned with costs and expenses and with profit only in the sense that it should make enough money to enable it to purchase new equipment and buildings, keep the track in repair, carry out necessary renovations, and so on. All these things cannot be done unless a surplus is earned by the transportation system and no one is suggesting that this should not be a consideration. But the profit objective must be an overall objective for the entire system, not something related to one particular part of the line or to a particular commodity at the expense of the interests of the people of Canada.

We ought not to tolerate a system which denies people a reasonable passenger service. I do not travel by train very often nowadays, but on occasions I do so. I have travelled both on Canadian Pacific and on Canadian National. Neither one is better than the other. The CP is just as bad as the CN and the CN is just as good as the CP. Each is doing everything it can to discourage travellers. If passengers wish to eat on the train in some parts of the country they get a stale sandwich, almost unpalatable and certainly indigestible. The whole atmosphere of the railway cars as well as the service provided is aimed at deliberately discouraging the use of the facilities. What are the railways for? We are making a very grave mistake, it seems to me, because as the minister has indicated, either in one of his answers in this chamber or in a statement made outside the House, developments are presently taking place affecting air travel and other forms of air transport which might well result in rail transportation becoming a great deal more desirable than it has been in the last few years.

I cannot end this part of my comments without expressing my horror at the number of accidents which have occurred on the railways. I expect one of my hon. friends will be dealing with this subject later, if he catches your