

*Transportation*

across Canada have already expressed concern due to the fact that in 1964 this same government, in its wisdom, introduced Bill No. C-120, and it is now history that that legislation fell flat on its face. To illustrate that I quote a headline from the *Western Producer* of October 1, 1964 which read, "Legislation On Branch Line Abandonment Totally Inadequate, Says Pool President." Criticism is again being directed against us on this very matter and it behooves all members of the house, whether in opposition or supporting the government, to work toward a final solution to the best of our ability and enact legislation that will meet the needs of present-day Canada.

I myself have been greatly and directly interested in the problem of rail line abandonment. I do not pretend to be an expert on cost accounting. I think we should leave that angle for the experts to discuss when we deal with it in committee, but I do have quite a lot of experience with rail line abandonment because it so happens that in my own riding, one of the longest branch lines in western Canada was abandoned in 1961 after lengthy consideration by the Board of Transport Commissioners. As the member for the area strong representations were made to me regarding the abandonment of that line.

At the time I felt action should have been delayed until the MacPherson royal commission had completed its report, at which time we could have considered the abandonment of the Wolseley branch line in the light of that report rather than in the context of piecemeal abandonment. In view of that experience I have become alarmed about abandonments and am naturally sympathetic to the concern of so many people in western Canada about the future prospects of abandonment because the railroads directly affect their lives and aspirations and particularly the well-being of those people whose economy is tied in with the agricultural industry and who depend on the railroads to move their grain to market without undue cost.

Because of my concern about this matter, in 1963 I introduced Bill No. C-70, in 1965 Bill No. C-20, and this year Bill No. C-86, which is presently on the order paper, dealing with the principle of a moratorium on rail line abandonment. There is a vagueness in the government's bill with regard to this principle. It is understood that the MacPherson royal commission report with respect to railway line abandonment will be acceptable in some areas, but when abandonment is

[Mr. Southam.]

recommended I believe a definite moratorium should be provided before actual abandonment takes place. In the bill I have on the order paper I have suggested a five year period.

• (6:00 p.m.)

I am very disappointed that the government has not seen fit to be more specific in its bill. Here again there is a certain vagueness. The reason it should be more specific is the importance of this matter to people who are affected by rail line abandonment. It is hard to give a definite figure of how many people will be directly affected by rail line abandonment in Saskatchewan but if further abandonment takes place many thousands of farmers will be affected. It is estimated that in western Canada something like 4,000 miles of railway line could be abandoned. I do not think all this mileage will be abandoned because, as I suggested earlier, the economic picture has changed so much within the last six or seven years that we can prove western rail lines are not so uneconomic as they once appeared to be.

Nevertheless it is understood that there will be some line abandonments. The farmers living along these lines have for many years depended upon them for the marketing of their grain. Elevator companies have built elevators along these lines, some of which are in a very good state of repair and some of which are relatively new. In the case of abandonments the farmers will have to travel greater distances to deliver their grain and the elevator companies will have to dismantle their elevators. New techniques have been found whereby the elevator companies can move an elevator lock, stock and barrel to a new site. In some cases they may have to and will repair these elevators because they feel they can be used for several years after the railway line abandonment.

Many small family enterprises are adjacent to these lines in western Canada. We do not have large cities on the prairies and our communities are serviced by small self-contained villages and towns of perhaps 300 to 500 in population, some even smaller. Often there are two or three elevators in these villages, a family store, a service station and a hardware store. Often one will find also an independent garageman or, as was the case in days gone by, a blacksmith shop. These are small self-contained units, and many of the residents are now wondering whether there will be a definite time limit set with regard to the proposed abandonments. Surely they