

employed has been too simplistic, I suggest, in the calculation of passenger and freight rail services in this country. It has been too simplistic and has not counted the cost of alternatives, nor the cost to the future in terms of environmental considerations.

It is trite for me to say, but I think it is perhaps worth reminding ourselves, that this problem is not in any way limited to southwestern Ontario. It is national in scope and concerns western Canada perhaps more immediately and more obviously than other parts of the country. Whether it be commuter rail service or ordinary passenger service, whether it be rail service of any kind, the trend in recent years has been to discontinue and reduce it, or to allow the facilities which support such services to deteriorate so that the service in time becomes more expensive and the case for discontinuing it apparently stronger.

I said I would be brief, and I shall. I urge the government not merely to support the notion of another study—I may say, a study under the particular body which gave approval to the discontinuation in the first place, and therefore not likely to be very objective in its assessment—not merely to give lip service to another study, but to say precisely where it stands. I suggest that the notion of another study is probably made in an effort to buy time or as a delaying tactic.

There must be plenty of data before the government and the Ministry of Transport on the basis of which the government could come to a firm conclusion; and if there is not, I am sure hon. members from the area would be very glad to supply it. I am not impressed by the assurance of the parliamentary secretary. I do not believe the government supports the notion of continuing rail service in those areas. If it does, let it say so in plain, simple English or French.

Mr. John Lundrigan (Gander-Twillingate): Mr. Speaker, I want to speak for just two or three minutes. I do not want to prevent my colleague, the hon. member for Fort William (Mr. McRae), putting his remarks on the record. I suspect he has documentation from departmental officials that might be of interest. I do not intend to be too hard on the hon. member for St. Boniface (Mr. Guay) who today performed the unusual role of attempting to present the prepared position of his government. I suggest that is understandable. He is beginning to sound as though he has made some growth in his party, particularly when he uses phrases such as "my government", "my policy", "my position", "our firm policy", etc. This is as bureaucratic and old-fashioned an approach as I have heard for some years, as long ago as the days when we had rail passenger service in Newfoundland in the form of old Bullet.

An hon. Member: 1962.

Mr. Lundrigan: In any event, I do not want to criticize the hon. member too severely because his prospects for future prosperity in his party are looking brighter by the day with every intervention he makes from his seat.

Getting back to the issue, I support certain of the arguments put forward by the hon. member who immediately preceded me. He specifically referred to southwestern Ontario and the need for real effort to be made in that part of his province toward the continuation of some kind of

Rail Transport

rail passenger service. Of course, you could get hon. members from western Ontario and from the Prairies, as well as from other areas of the country where rail lines have been abandoned, to support that argument: this is also true of members from Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and various regions of the province of Quebec.

If the government has done anything since 1968 when I first came here, it has taken an unwritten, unconfirmed and "under the table" pass at rural Canada. It has taken the position that rural Canada should be discouraged in all aspects and that there should be an undermining encouragement toward the urban drift which the world has witnessed in the last half-century. When saying that, I look across at the hon. member for Bruce (Mr. Whicher) to whom we refer sometimes, when we are kidding him, as the unofficial Tory member because he does represent a lot of conservative attitudes. He has made a strong effort, in terms of textbook arguments, against government policy harmful to rural Canada.

The point I want to touch upon relates to government policy in respect of transportation services. I think we must look at our over-all services, none of which can be related so closely to our economic structure as our transportation system. That is why when we talk about transportation we are not only talking about public services but very much about economic necessity.

● (1740)

A number of years ago the hon. member from my riding—it was called Bonavista-Twillingate in those days—was the Hon. Jack Pickersgill, a good friend of many members of the House of Commons. At that time he was attempting in his own way to create some kind of buffer for the government on matters of transportation. He was the architect and designer of the Canadian Transport Commission.

The commission is one of the most intriguing animals that ever existed in federal government. Today, if you approach Mr. Benson in the CTC, he says you have the wrong man and you must go to the Department of Transport which created the original legislation and has legislative responsibility for transportation. If you go to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand), he will tell you frankly, candidly and openly that you have the wrong man, that you must go to the commission because they are a quasi-judicial body, a body which is above the law and they are not in any way subject to the will of parliament in the sense that we can point the finger at them and tell them what to do.

The transportation situation in Canada is criminal, because no one seems to have proper responsibility for it. In times when the Canadian Transport Commission did not exist, one could always go to the Minister of Transport with whatever problems one had or whatever applications came forward for the abandonment of a rail service. The minister had responsibility and he was held accountable to the Parliament of Canada and to the Canadian people. Today, one cannot approach him.

I remember when the hon. member for Burin-Burgeon (Mr. Jamieson) was in charge of transportation. He could squirm away from any transportation issue by saying that it came under the quasi-judicial jurisdiction of the CTC.