

*Transport and Communications*

motion to be adopted, at least so far as the records are concerned.

In the records of the Transport Committee there is reference to a press release from the Canadian National indicating that the company was going to leave the passenger train in service. In addition, Canadian National filed with the committee a letter under date of March 14, 1969, and I would like to read a portion of that report dealing with Newfoundland passenger train service:

Throughout the winter we have been keeping a close check on the situation and as the April 15th date approaches, which is the date on which the Commission must make its final disposition of the matter, we are in the process of reassessing the situation. This, basically, was the intended import of the recent statements by Newfoundland Railway officers in response to inquiries. From the recent statistics that I have it will be apparent that there has been a very heavy response to the bus operation by the people of Newfoundland, and in light of this our operating people are examining the position regarding the number of buses that will be required during the coming months. In view of this, we have in contemplation the possibility of having the train services extended for a short period beyond April 15th.

• (4:10 p.m.)

I conclude with these words:

—it is not our intention that the train services be continued indefinitely.

If Canadian National Railways as a crown corporation can take unto itself the right to decide when that particular passenger train will be discontinued, then I say in all sincerity that if this committee, as a creature of the House of Commons, does not have the same right then every committee of the house might just as well be disbanded.

Let us take a look at Board Order No. R-2673. I shall read only a portion of the fifth part:

—it may upon notice to the applicants and to all parties who appeared before it in December, 1967, reconvene the hearing to consider whether in the exercise of its general powers under the Railway Act, it should impose further conditions to be met prior to the discontinuance of the passenger train service or direct the adoption of such measures as may be necessary to ensure the adequacy of the bus service.

Surely anyone who is willing to consider the pros and cons of the situation will realize that we have as much right to make recommendations to the House of Commons as anyone else in respect of adopting the recommendation of the Canadian Transport Commission. We are not going beyond our line of authority. We have as much right as Canadian National Railways to make the decision

[Mr. Skoberg.]

that has been made. I agree with the decision. I believe it is an excellent decision other than the fact that I do not agree with the short-term continuation. I believe this too will have to be taken into consideration by the Canadian Transport Commission at a later date. It would appear that somewhere along the line there must have been some direction given to the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications. I hope the cabinet will not decide, merely on the whim of the house leader, that they will not accept the recommendations we make.

Perhaps the only purpose of the standing committees at this time in the House of Commons is to give the backbenchers of the Liberal party something to do. This was stated by one of their members on a television show. But if the backbenchers of the Liberal party do make a decision that the cabinet is not in favour of, the cabinet will not allow it. If I were a backbencher of that party I would dissociate myself from any committee of the house where such a situation arises. I do not want to serve on committees if every recommendation is to be considered in the way this recommendation has been treated by the house leader. I think he should take a very close look at himself in the mirror this evening to see why he has taken the position he has in respect of this subject.

I assure the minister that there was no intention to have a debate on this matter. It was only through the intervention of the house leader that it became necessary. I should like to refer to a situation which developed two years ago. On January 19, 1968, the seconder of the motion of the house leader today, Mr. Olson, asked this question:

Has the government received a request that the Governor in Council reverse the decision of the Board of Transport Commissioners which allowed the C.P.R. to abandon the passenger service known as the Dominion? If so, will the government grant a hearing to reconsider this decision of the Board of Transport Commissioners?

The answer was:

The Governor in Council has a duty under the law to hear any appeal from the decision of the Board on matters of fact. There has been notice that there will be an appeal and it is the intention of the government to hear any appeal that may be made as expeditiously as possible.

I believe it is absolutely a must that the members of this house realize what section 53 of the Railway Act says. In this section it is very apparent that the Governor in Council has the right to take action on his own initiative. It is apparent that rather than embarrass themselves by failing to take action the