

Supply—Transport

the crown said that that would not be so, and notwithstanding the fact that the Minister of Public Works, when he sat on this side of the house, singled me out on more than one occasion and attacked me personally on more than one occasion because of the fact that the government of the day was not doing a thing to see to it that Canada, a country of our importance, was not subsidizing deep-sea ships.

Item agreed to.

788. Canadian National Railways deficit, 1958—Amount required to provide for payment to the Canadian National Railway Company (hereinafter called the national company) upon applications approved by the Minister of Transport, made by the national company to the Minister of Finance, and to be applied by the national company in payment of the system deficit (certified by the auditors of the national company) arising in the calendar year 1958, subject to recovery therefrom of accountable advances made to the national company from the consolidated revenue fund, \$51,591,424.

Mr. Brassard (Lapointe): I would like to say a few words on this item. I would prefer, of course, that the Minister of Transport was in his place, but he must have a good reason to be absent. In the name of many public bodies in my riding and of the whole Saguenay-lake St. John region I have tried to obtain from the Canadian National Railways management the operating figures for the last two or three years between Montreal and Chicoutimi and between Quebec and Chicoutimi. I have had correspondence myself with a couple of senior officials of the Canadian National Railways and finally, I was told—I have a letter on my desk dated March 19—that this information cannot be given out to the public because they are afraid it would help their competitors. The Canadian National Railways has no competitors in the region. The Canadian National Railways give us a good service but they have no competitors. The reason the people are asking for these figures is that they feel we should have urgent repairs made to the line from Montreal to Chicoutimi and from Quebec to Chicoutimi. These repairs are urgently needed.

I should like to speak a little longer on this item but I shall wait until the estimates of the Department of Transport are before the committee to make a clearer explanation to the minister.

Mr. Chevrier: Mr. Chairman, this is a pretty big item. I know that on a supplementary item the minister cannot be expected to go into all the details. However, it is a pretty substantial deficit and while it has been discussed in general I wonder whether the minister would be good enough to point out the highlights of the amount.

[Mr. Chevrier.]

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): Yes, gladly, Mr. Chairman. I think the committee will be pleased to know that the operating picture presented by the Canadian National Railways for the year 1958 is slightly better than was expected a year earlier, and while the deficit is quite substantial, namely \$51,591,424, it is, I am glad to say, nevertheless actually less than was anticipated some months ago.

The statement follows the usual form and I recall to the attention of members of the committee that the Canadian National Railways, with their senior officers, will be appearing, quite soon after the Easter recess, before the special committee annually appointed by the house to review the report and operations of the system and there will be opportunity then for hon. members to ask questions and obtain information in detail.

Mr. Chevrier: Mr. Chairman, I am sure the house will be happy to learn that the financial position of the railway is better than was anticipated prior to the end of the year; but that leads me to a number of other questions on this item which is substantial and of great importance. The railway policy of the government as effected by its agency the Canadian National Railways and the Minister of Finance, being responsible for these moneys and being responsible for this vote whether it be in the statute that comes before the house each year, will be in even a better position to answer than the Minister of Transport himself. The question I ask is this: What additional lines are anticipated during the year 1959 through the instrumentality of the Canadian National Railways?

There have been a number of lines which have been of special interest to all members on this side of the house. I cannot speak for all of them. They have already mentioned their interest in them, but I do know that representations were made when we were in office and since the new administration has been in office, for the construction of a line from my hon. friend's area, the member for Lapointe from lake St. John and/or Murray bay, down along the north shore of the St. Lawrence to Seven Islands. I have mentioned the hon. member for Lapointe. There have been representations made to the government for the construction of a line in the Gaspé peninsula.

I am sure that when these representations are made the Minister of Finance is always on the delegation to consider them, and is in a position to tell us, perhaps more effectively than other ministers might, of the policy of the government with reference to these. I hope the minister will not simply rise and say that the policy will be announced in due course. I would not expect an answer like