

be subjected to the incivilities and sarcastic remarks of a minister whose support is requested.

Mr. Speaker, Bill C-48 will increase the power of the minister to the detriment of the Canadian Transport Commission. It is unfortunate that it should be thought that he does not know what to do with his powers, that he is not interested in his department and that he does not give a darn about the needs of the people.

Mr. Speaker, for years now the government has been promising appropriate measures. This bill does not solve all the problems; it should be more complete to spare us having to study an omnibus bill dealing with all aspects of transport in Canada with a view to finding concrete solutions.

Mr. Speaker, Canada now has a deplorable railway system. The slowness of its services, the outrageous cost of the food served to the passengers, the poor condition of the tracks, to name but a few, must be looked into. Canadians give millions of dollars every year to the railway companies. They have the right to demand adequate services, to know how their money is spent, to find out exactly how much freight transportation costs.

Mr. Speaker, Bill C-48 really changes nothing in what already existed since the governor in council and the Canadian Transport Commission could already use it. Section 331.4(2) states that if a railway company refuses to conform to a request from the minister, the minister may exercise the power available to him under National Transportation Act section 82, as an emergency measure. As I said earlier, the bill increases authority that the minister could not use adequately in the past.

I am convinced, Mr. Speaker, that railways are badly administered. I am also convinced that this could have been rectified without Bill C-48. This is why I say that the bill is only a screen to postpone the study of adequate solutions to transportation problems, a study which we consider vital. This is why, Mr. Speaker, I urge the government to end the study of this bill as soon as possible since it brings no concrete answer to present problems. This is why I say that the minister is not behaving sensibly. I refer to the question which I asked him on March 10. I then asked if it would be possible to investigate railway transportation services in northwestern Quebec, where the situation was deplorable, since a parcel could take up to 15 days to go from Montreal to Val-d'Or. Yesterday, I received a press release from my area which said that a dealer had ordered on January 24 a part which he needed urgently and that he received it only on March 18.

That is why I am saying that the minister does not care for the problems of far away regions like Abitibi, Lac-Saint-Jean and Gaspésie.

[English]

Mr. Smith (Saint-Jean): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the unanimous consent of the House to present a report.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is this agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Railway Act

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Fifth report of Standing Committee on Agriculture—Mr. Smith (Saint-Jean).

[Editor's Note: For text of above report see today's Votes and Proceedings.]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It being one o'clock, I do now leave the chair until two o'clock this afternoon.

At one o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

RAILWAY ACT

AMENDMENT TO GIVE AUTHORITY TO MINISTER TO ACQUIRE CERTAIN COST INFORMATION FROM COMPANIES

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Marchand (Langelier) that Bill C-48, to amend the Railway Act, be read the third time and do pass.

Mr. Cliff McIsaac (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I should reply briefly to some of the points raised by the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski) in his contribution to our discussion on third reading of Bill C-48. While the bill does not contain a large number of provisions, its production has already had a positive effect in increasing the supply of information from the railroad companies to the provinces concerned.

As has been pointed out, the bill makes provision for the exchange of information between governments on a confidential basis, but this does not limit its value in dealing with the whole subject of freight rates. It is understandable that the railway companies should not be anxious to see all their confidential data passed on to other competing modes of transportation. The fact is that the railroads have already been providing to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand), and through him to the provinces, information on a large number of items and in response to a number of requests submitted to the department following the western economic opportunities conference. The railway companies have also been providing information relative to other inquiries put forward by the prairie provinces as well as in connection with other studies which are under way, including the rail roadbed study.

The hon. member for Vegreville made a very good point in that much of the information derived from these studies should soon be made available on a wider basis. The federal-provincial committee on western transportation