

I ask the Chair to allow me to ask the government the following question: If the Chair decides that the bill is not in order, which is possible, can the government tell the House what bill it would have us consider in its place?

[English]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: This may help the House. I am informed that the Speaker intends to make a ruling on the matter raised by the member for Ottawa—Vanier on 3 p.m. on Monday.

Mr. Gauthier: That is my point, Mr. Speaker. There are two possibilities. It is either going to be correct for the House to proceed to second reading, or not correct.

In the event that it is not correct. I am asking the government to tell us right now what the back-up legislation will be.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I am sure if the hon. member had listened carefully to the arguments as put forward by the Minister of Finance and myself yesterday, he would recognize that we are very confident that we will have an affirmative ruling and we certainly feel, after listening to those arguments, that they removed all shadow of doubt.

I can assure the hon. member that because we, as a government, are always prepared, we do have another bill, Bill C-52, which in that very, very unlikely event after those stunning arguments we do not have an affirmative ruling, we would be prepared to pick up that bill.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

RAILWAY ACT

MEASURE TO AMEND

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Bouchard (Roberval) that Bill C-5, an act to amend the Railway Act, be read the second time and referred to a legislative committee.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the ministerial statement, Government Orders will be extended today by 23 minutes.

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I interrupted this morning at 11 a.m. when the member for Vancouver East asked a

question. The member for Regina—Lumsden was going to answer. I will allow the member for Vancouver East to summarize her question to the member for Regina—Lumsden.

Ms. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, it was a while ago, but if I recall correctly, I was asking my colleague who had been speaking on this bill to explain some of the difficulties and some of the solutions to an improved and expanded railway system, particularly as it connects with the ports. I am thinking particularly of the Port of Vancouver and the necessity to compete with the American system which has such things as double decker trains and much more efficient services and, therefore, is causing shipments of grain and other things often to go through the American line, through the Port of Seattle and Tacoma, rather than through Vancouver.

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question. At 11 o'clock, she called me an expert, although she did not this time. But I do not want to be called that.

My hon. colleague is perfectly right. There must be a massive public investment in the infrastructure of railway lines not only in Vancouver, but in many other ports, such as the infrastructure in every city across Canada, whether it is rail line relocation, grade separations, overpasses or underpasses. If you are going to raise the clearances on railway lines into a port like Vancouver to allow for higher railway cars, you are looking at a lot of money. When you have to raise bridges or lower roadways, you are looking at a lot of investment.

Obviously, the private sector is not going to invest in that. It is like the streets, sidewalks, sewers, water systems and whatnot. If the government thought it could privatize those, it would, but nobody would buy them in a month of Sundays.

The same thing applies to something like the railway system, which is a public utility. You have to treat it that way. It is not an expense. It is an investment because, as my colleague intimated, Burlington Northern is now attracting plywood, grain, and a host of other products across the border from New Westminster or from Lethbridge, and hauling it on Burlington Northern and Conrail at the expense of the Canadian railway system. Because of things this government agrees with, like confidential contracts, faster tax write-offs for American railroads than Canadian railroads have, our railroads are working at a disadvantage.

The government is not about to invest in the kind of rail line improvements that have to take place. It is going to require further public investment. It is rebuilding and modernizing of a system that is 20 or 30 years out of date. It requires, I would estimate, something in the order of