

Adjournment Debate

dealt in a very unusual and peremptory way on May 15. Your Honour will recall, as all hon. members of this House assembled tonight will recall, that on that day, I raised with the Minister of Transport the very simple proposition that, knowing his strong feelings about transportation policy and about western grain transportation, just possibly he would consult the chief architect of the royal commission appointed by him, Mr. Justice Emmett Hall.

● (2212)

The minister was mortified that I should make the radical suggestion to him that somehow a man who had spent two years as the head of a very worth-while study group on which something like \$1.8 million has been spent should be consulted with respect to the implementation of the report. The minister at that time said that he was really surprised because he thought the report was quite clear and there was really nothing much to discuss with Mr. Justice Hall. I suppose that Mr. Justice Hall heard this kind of reaction on the part of the minister, this inflexible, unflinching attitude that the minister took with respect to the reasonable request put forward by myself and other members on this side, and is reported to have said in Regina on May 24, according to a CP story, that:

Lip service has been given to the report rather than being implemented.

The article points out the following:

One year after the release of his report on the prairie grain handling and transportation system, former Chief Justice Hall is a disappointed man.

The federal government has virtually ignored the recommendations in the report, Hall said in an interview.

This flies diametrically in the face of what the minister has said, and it seems to me, therefore, that we should have the expertise of Mr. Justice Hall before the committee. My colleagues and I have fought the good fight, but lo and behold, what has happened tonight is that a motion has been brought forward that Mr. Justice Hall and Mr. Fred Anderson, the chairman of the Prairie Rail Action Committee, be brought before the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications. This was fought tooth and nail by the Liberal members of that committee. They thought it was heresy and the worst thing that could be suggested, except for one backbencher, the hon. member for Kitchener (Mr. Flynn), who at the time of the vote screwed up his courage and stood together with the opposition members. I should point out that this man is not held in very high regard by his own party. He has been edged out of his seat, so no wonder he is thinking independently.

So we were able to carry this motion tonight by nine votes to eight. The parliamentary secretary might want to report on what happened at that meeting because he must be chagrined at the fact that the very worth-while suggestion of the opposition members was accepted by the committee. That committee, with only one member from western Canada on the Liberal side, fought tooth and nail to prevent Mr. Justice Hall from appearing before the committee. I say it is not acceptable that this government should move in an area which is so important to western Canada when it does not take every

[Mr. Hnatyshyn.]

opportunity of utilizing the expertise that Mr. Justice Hall brings to the particular topic of grain transportation; and second, that when the government does act, its actions fly in the face of the many recommendations contained in the Hall commission report, while the government is saying that it is accepting the recommendations in the report.

It will be interesting to cross-examine Mr. Fred Anderson of the new Prairie Rail Action Committee to find out what is the rationale for their decision. It seems to me that one of the problems in determining whether certain rail lines will be brought into the permanent network and others abandoned is that we do not as yet know what will be the position of the grain and elevator companies with respect to their own plans. I say we are opening a very large can of worms in western Canada when the grain companies have not yet decided what they will do as far as elevators are concerned, and we are making decisions as to which lines should be abandoned and which should not.

I will be interested to hear the parliamentary secretary try to justify the rather insane attitude taken by the government in refusing to discuss matters with Mr. Justice Hall and fighting tooth and nail to prevent him from coming before the committee.

Mr. Maurice Harquail (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State for Urban Affairs): Mr. Speaker, since the hon. member has invited me to report my observations about the meeting of the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications this evening, let me tell the House and the country of the obstructionist tactics of the official opposition, which were also clearly observed at the previous meeting of the committee when the opposition members refused to allow the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) to answer questions and thus we were unable to question the minister on the main estimates. They followed the same negative tack this evening in not allowing him to answer questions in respect of the Hall commission report. We witnessed this for many days when we were considering Bill C-17 for the recapitalization of Canadian National.

● (2217)

To anyone who pays attention to the meetings of the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, the strategy of the official opposition is not a surprise. I should like to indicate to the hon. member that I deferred my time in order to answer these questions.

The hon. member for Battleford-Kindersley (Mr. McIsaac) was able to put some very good questions to the Minister of Transport. The minister was able to enlighten the committee at length about the position of the government regarding the Hall report. Also the minister has had meetings with farm groups and individual farmers about the Hall commission report. Hon. members opposite should not lose sight of the fact that it was the Minister of Transport who instituted this commission and who has stated repeatedly that it is his intention to implement the main recommendations of the report. The Hall commission report is clearly written. The