

Transportation

It is submitted that parliament, having created the Railway Act to govern the operation of railways, should also have the power to provide for the conditions under which they should be abandoned. That is what I am proposing.

The proposed amendments to the Railway Act as contained in this bill are of paramount importance to this country. This bill is one of the most important pieces of legislation this parliament will have to consider and we must approach it with great caution. There are overriding differences of opinion about the changes which should be made in our railway legislation because these changes affect different regions of the country.

The prairie provinces—the great grain growing areas and the so-called bread basket of Canada—require certain concessions under our railway legislation. They have always had certain special rights under this legislation, one of which is the Crowsnest pass agreement. The Atlantic provinces are in the same position. Special privileges and rights have been given them under our railway legislation. We should avoid any hurried amendment to this legislation. We must take our time and give careful consideration to every step in this process. For that reason I wish to move an amendment.

My amendment seeks further investigation by the standing committee on railways before the house proceeds further with this legislation. I think it would be of great advantage to the members of this house to have before them a report of a committee which had heard representations by interested parties in Canada, including provincial governments, wheat pools, railway companies, shippers, consumers and others who will be affected, before second reading is given to this bill.

I move, seconded by the hon. member for Kent (Ont.) (Mr. Danforth):

That all the words after "that" be deleted and the following substituted therefor:

This house, while prepared to support the principle of a national transportation policy, is of the opinion that, owing to its complexity, the subject matter of this bill be referred to the standing committee on transport and communications for consideration and report, without prejudice to the further proceeding with the said bill later this session.

Mr. Pickersgill: Mr. Speaker, before you put the motion perhaps I could ask Your Honour to consider at this time or subsequently whether or not a motion of this sort is in order at this stage of our proceedings.

[Mr. Thomas.]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I make any comment on whether or not the amendment is acceptable, perhaps hon. members would like to express their opinions.

● (4:50 p.m.)

Mr. Pickersgill: Mr. Speaker, it does not seem to me that this is a proper amendment because it does not say whether the house should or should not proceed with second reading of the bill. It makes the suggestion that something entirely different should be done without prejudice to the order paper. I do not see how an amendment can be moved that does not prejudice the order paper and still be a proper amendment, if the word "prejudice" means anything at all. Moreover, it seems to me that this amendment, or purported amendment, deals with the subject in another way entirely, though the subject is perhaps the same as the subject matter of the bill. What the amendment proposes is something that is so essentially different that it would appear to me that if this kind of motion was in order at all it would require to be treated as a substantive motion requiring notice. I would have thought, Mr. Speaker, that unless the amendment proposes to do something substantially different from the second reading of the bill it is not at this stage in order.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Speaker, it may be that the form in which this amendment has been moved varies somewhat from second reading amendments that have been allowed in the past.

Mr. Pickersgill: It certainly does.

Mr. Knowles: But it does seem to me that Your Honour should take a good look at the amendment in the light of citation 382 of Beauchesne's fourth edition. I know it is very easy for the government to rise every time there is an amendment on second reading, every time there is a request for the subject matter of a bill to be considered before second reading is voted on, simply to say that it cannot be done.

I suppose it is foreign to procedure as we practice it in the House of Commons to suggest that we should follow common sense, but it seems to me that there is common sense in the suggestion that as complex a bill as this might be looked at by a committee, with that committee reporting back to the house before the house decides on the principle on second reading.