

The Address

siderable applause from those who heard him. There is a constitutional way of proceeding.

The Government, I notice, has referred back to the Railway Commission the appeal that was made to them regarding dairy products and express rates. I agree that that was a wise course to pursue, but it occurs to me, Mr. Speaker, that while we should not interfere with a court of equity or a court of law, while we should not seek to influence unduly one way or the other a judge on the Bench—and that is virtually what the Railway Commission amounts to when they are trying a case—yet as representatives of the people in this Parliament I think we might very properly consider the question of freight rates, or transportation, when that question is so acute that it affects the economic and industrial life of the country seriously. Undoubtedly it is affecting the economic and industrial life of this country very seriously at this time, and so, without interfering with the jurisdiction and the duties of the chairman of the Railway Board, or suggesting, as the Minister of Agriculture has done, that he should be fired, I think that after due consideration by this House it will be quite competent for us to make suggestions to the board.

For instance, we could suggest that the Railway Board should consider the advisability of reducing the commodity rates. I am not much concerned what the rates are on a bolt of silk valued at about one dollar per ounce, or about the rates on drugs which may be worth one, two or three dollars an ounce, because these things do not enter very much into the economic life of the country, but I am deeply concerned about the tonnage rate on coal, on cement, lumber, grain, coarse grains and wheat, and such things as that. These are commodities that touch the life of every person in the community. These are the commodities which, if the rate is right, the production and the movement of them may be encouraged and developed, whereas, on the other hand, if the rate is increased beyond a certain point, it will stop their production. An instance was cited by my hon. friend from Comox-Alberni (Mr. Neill) where when the freight rate was raised last year on lumber, a mill had to shut down because they could not market their lumber on account of the rate. That I know to be true; I know case after case where this was so. We find that when we ship lumber to prairie points like Regina, Saskatoon, Moosejaw,

[Mr. Stevens.]

the freight rate is far greater than the total cost of the lumber at point of shipment. This simply illustrates the danger of a policy being adopted, by the Railway Board, if you will, whereby the economic life of the country may be stifled, where it is so interfered with that it does not move with that freedom which is necessary for prosperity, and so I suggest this in connection with the freight rate problem: While not desiring to interfere in any unconstitutional manner with the duties of the Railway Board, I think Parliament might very well deliberate on this problem and give its expressions, through Council or otherwise, to the Board of Railway Commissioners. Then if it is found that that process results in no satisfactory results, we may, and it is within our power to do so, carefully scrutinize the Railway Act of Canada, one of the most important statutes we have. It is possible, Sir, that we would find some way by amendment to the Railway Act of dealing with this question; but the point I am coming at, what I have been dealing with all through my argument regarding freight rates, is, that it is clear to the lay mind of Canada that the freight rates at this time are too high on ordinary commodities.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

After Recess

The House resumed at eight o'clock.

Mr. STEVENS (resuming): Mr. Speaker, when the House rose at six o'clock, I had virtually completed the few remarks that I desired to make in connection with the question of transportation. I do not see the Minister of Railways (Mr. Kennedy) in his seat; but I am reminded that the Prime Minister, in his address in this debate, referring to a query as to the intention of the Government and dealing with this problem in a broader way than I have been discussing it, stated that the House would be called upon to wait until the Minister of Railways made a statement. We shall await, with a great deal of interest, and, I might say, anxiety, for this statement of the Minister of Railways. Aside from the bearing that transportation has, at the present time, upon other problems to which I have already referred, the transportation question or the question of the national railways is, in itself, of very grave importance. We did, however, get a glimpse, I think, into the mind of the Government by the speech of