

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS

ALLEGED CONTRAVENTION OF RAILWAY ACT—MOTION UNDER S.O. 43

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Madam Speaker, I too rise under the provisions of Standing Order 43. Since Canadian National Railways plans to cut back on its express service by up to 40 per cent nationally, which will affect many communities which do not have reasonable, low-priced alternatives, since in northern Manitoba the cutbacks will mean an abandonment of service in many communities which do not even have road access, meaning that essential goods will cost much more for those residents, and since section 262 of the Railway Act gives the federal government the authority to intervene to ensure that the railways provide suitable accommodation for traffic offered, I move, seconded by the hon. member for Winnipeg-Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie):

That the Minister of Transport immediately intervene in this matter by charging CN as being in contravention of the Railway Act, and by ensuring that parcel service is continued to Manitoba's northern communities.

Madam Speaker: For presentation, this motion requires the unanimous consent of the House. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: No.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

THE CONSTITUTION

SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE—APPEARANCE OF EXPERT WITNESSES

Hon. Jake Epp (Provencher): Madam Speaker, I would like to direct my question to the Prime Minister. The question relates to government policy. At the time the joint committee studied the constitutional proposals known as Bill C-60, the committee had the opportunity to hear a number of expert witnesses give their opinions and views on the bill. In fact, the committee heard a total of 11 so-called expert witnesses at that time. Will the Prime Minister advise whether it is government policy to deny parliamentary committees the right to hear expert witnesses and whether it is government policy to deny Canadians who are expert witnesses to appear before the constitution committee.

● (1415)

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, there is no policy in this regard. Our intention with regard to that committee is that it should do its job, particularly regarding the substance of the proposals before it, to wit, the patriation of the Canadian constitution, the acceptance of an amending formula and the insertion of a bill of rights. Within its time framework the committee is master of its own

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procedures and it should get on with the job rather than bog down in procedural debates for fear that it would have to debate the substance.

Mr. Epp: The Prime Minister says that the committee should be, and is master of its own proceedings and agenda, yet the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, in replying to the committee yesterday, said that it should be up to the House to decide the matter of the scheduling of the expert witnesses. I would like to ask the right hon. gentleman, since many of the umbrella groups which have appeared before the committee have shown that there are serious flaws in the proposed package that is before the committee, is it the fear of the government that, if such experts were allowed to appear, additional and more glaring deficiencies of the proposed resolution would be made public to Canadians at large?

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, I think you will recognize that the tenor of the question indicates the wisdom of the rule that we not comment in this place on what is going on in committee until the committee makes the report. I think the hon. member has given a good illustration of why that rule should be adhered to.

As to his suggestion that we are not willing to hear witnesses, I point out to the hon. member that although I do not have the exact figure, it seems to me there are more than 200 submissions which have been made. There has been ample occasion for Canadians through these submissions to indicate their points of view. What the opposition seems to fear is that it might have to make up its mind on the substance. That is why they seem to be spending so much time on this kind of preoccupation that is raised now by the hon. member.

Mr. Epp: Madam Speaker, again my supplementary question is for the Right Hon. Prime Minister. This party has no fear as to the substance of our position.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Epp: I am pleased that the Prime Minister has indicated that there are 200 groups or individuals who want to appear before the committee. As a result of the government's timetable, they will not be able to appear. That is the point. They cannot appear, nor are they asked now by the government to appear. They are denied the right to appear by the very policy which his government has adopted through its members on the committee. In view of that policy and the manner in which those members voted yesterday to deny Canadians the right to be heard, will the Prime Minister now—

Some hon. Members: Oh!

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member is referring to a vote or some proceeding that took place in the committee.

An hon. Member: No.