

Transportation

An hon. Member: That's O.K. So much the better.

● (10:10 p.m.)

[Translation]

Mr. Grégoire: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. If it was the intention of the Minister of Transport that the house should adjourn tonight at ten o'clock, he only had to provide in his motion that the house should sit from six to ten.

You read the motion a moment ago, Mr. Speaker, and it does not contain anything of the sort. It simply provides that the house continue to sit after six o'clock. It is the motion passed by the house this afternoon and it must be adhered to.

If an agreement has been entered into, we, independents, are not aware of it. Let us be kept informed of what goes on in the house and we shall abide by the agreements which may be concluded.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a few words on the bill now under consideration.

I do not know if the other members of the house noticed it but when we discussed the first railway bill asking that the strike be suspended, I abstained from saying anything, because I recognized the urgency of the bill and of its being passed as soon as possible for the greatest good of the Canadian economy. On the other hand, I would not like to remain silent on this bill and I will therefore make a few remarks.

We have today in Canada a situation where the railways are, under an act, prohibited from increasing their tariffs, which are frozen at a certain level, and, on the other hand, the railway employees are asking for a salary increase and cannot get it as long as the tariffs are frozen, because if the C.N.R. decided on its own to increase the salary of one C.N.R. employee, right away the C.N.R. deficit increases and if it does, it is the budget of Canada itself which will have to make up that deficit and that automatically opens the door to the president and the authorities of the C.N.R. to decide on their own how the money of the Canadian budget will be spent, without previous consultation with the Canadian parliament.

Any salary increase of one cent to the C.N.R. employees would automatically mean that that money had been taken out of the budget of the Canadian government and that would indicate that the C.N.R. had the right to take over the estimates of the Minister

[Mr. Nasserden.]

of Finance without previous consultation with the Canadian government.

And that is the reason why, during the negotiations, there were really no actual and effective negotiations because, on the one hand, under an act, the railways could not increase their tariffs and, on the other, under an act or the constitution, the C.N.R. does not have the right to spend money if such money has not been voted by the Canadian government, the Canadian parliament, when such money comes out of the current budget of the parliament.

But, Mr. Speaker, there is more to it than that. It is just that through the granting of subsidies for several years already, subsidies granted by parliament to the railway companies, the latter have used them to compete unfairly, uncomprehendingly, to operate illogically a transportation system. Unfair competition because the railway companies did not use those subsidies simply to freeze their rates but to reduce them, which was not provided for in the legislation granting them subsidies.

And here are several examples. Here is what a transportation company of the lower St. Lawrence region wrote to me on March 10, 1966:

To give you a striking example of the bad faith of the C.N.R., allow me to tell you the following story: "When the government decided that truckers were entitled to subsidies for feed grains, for a locality in our territory, the railway rate stood at 49 cents for a carfull; after the government decided that the subsidies would be granted to the consignees, the C.N.R. published a rate of 57 cents. However, when the customer made up his mind to give his business to a trucker, the C.N.R. representative contacted him and offered him a rate of 29 cents, a rate which has in fact been published since.

That means that with the subsidies which the railways received, not only did they not maintain their rates, but they reduced them, which was not at all provided for in the supply bill. I have just given an example of the lowering of rates from 57 to 29 cents, which means that the transport companies could no longer compete with the railways.

Mr. Speaker, I have here another example from the Lac-Saint-Jean area and I would like to read this letter from a transport company in the riding of Lac-Saint-Jean:

I haul grain in bulk from Quebec to Lake St. John at the rate of 24 cents per hundredweight, which is the same rate as the railways.

Today, this takes the cake; up until now, this could be arranged, with great difficulty, but now the railways have suddenly decided to cut their