

Railway Act

involved are carefully considered by the board and that the public interest is of paramount concern to the board in reaching a conclusion. In the circumstances I must advise the house that the government is opposed to the amendment.

Mr. A. E. Robinson (Bruce): Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a few remarks on the second reading of this bill. I appreciate the feelings of the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Herridge) in moving it. He is not alone in his problem. I understand that the line he has been referring to is a Canadian Pacific line. Up in our district we are served mostly by the Canadian National. I agree with all the remarks made by the minister. I have found out that the board of transport commissioners did for us up in Bruce just what the hon. member for Kootenay West is now asking to have done by this amendment to the act.

If there were a clause in the amendment along the lines that the board of transport commissioners should look into their findings a little more closely in connection with giving service to different communities I would be all for it. In our district we have found that after a railroad has lost the business they attempt to cut off the service. I am not finding fault with the officials of the railroad; they are there to do a job. The only thing I am finding fault with is the findings of the board of transport commissioners.

In our case we had a paying line at a time when the railways in Canada were not paying their way. Through mismanagement of some sort the railways lost their business to other types of transportation and now they have decided to curtail our services. I would say that such curtailment is just another move toward centralization which has been going on for the last 22 years as far as any government leadership is concerned. The height of irony is the fact that we are losing our service; after having our lines pay their way for a great number of years we are to be called on to contribute our share of the subsidy to the Canadian National Railways. If that is not adding insult to injury I do not know what it is. I agree with the minister's remarks that this amendment would not help the act at all.

I should like to put on the record my view that the board of transport commissioners are not exercising the judgment that should be used in dealing with this problem. I have no further remarks to make except to say that I cannot see any merit in the amendment.

Mr. F. J. Bigg (Athabasca): Mr. Speaker, it is so many years since the constituency of Athabasca has been represented in this house

[Mr. Hees.]

in any manner which has been satisfactory to the people that I think I had better tell you where Athabasca is.

Mr. Pickersgill: Shame.

Mr. Winch: How about discussing the bill before us?

Mr. Bigg: We will get to that. Athabasca is situated in the northeast corner of Alberta and covers 60,000 square miles. This area is poorly serviced at the moment by any form of transportation. We, in Athabasca, feel that transportation is of vital importance because this area forms the gateway to the north. Many pioneers have gone into this vast territory on their own and they feel that Canada, now that she has vast resources at her disposal, is in a position to give considerable support to the development of the north country. Many of these people have taken the initiative and have given their whole lives to the development of this country. Now, they look to us to give them support.

One of the most important means of transportation is, of course, the railway. Arguments have been presented to the effect that the railways have outlived their usefulness. Consideration is being given to the closing of many branch lines, while many others will have their service curtailed. Let us not be hasty about this. The whole economic situation in Canada is changing rapidly. We do not intend to spend money like drunken sailors, but we must plan our transportation services. The question here is, first of all, whether or not railroads should be built into that part of the country. We in Athabasca believe that rail lines should be built in there, and particularly from the McMurray district northwards. This railway would serve not only the known resources in there, but would be available for future development.

So far as the servicing of the industries now in the north are concerned, we have a very active railway to Fort McMurray, at least to Waterways, which is the Fort McMurray end of the line. This railway is known as the Northern Alberta Railway, and is a joint venture of the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific railroads. There is considerable tonnage passing over the line, in fact the annual report shows it is a paying line. Again, I do not want to jump to conclusions because when we say "paying line" we mean that the books balance; we mean that on paper this part of the line pays.

As we all know, our railroad companies are operated as companies. Even the government-owned railways are operated as crown corporations, and they have to balance their books. This balancing of the books does not necessarily mean that the lines pay.