

Railways

government, and the system is so advanced that deficits have been virtually eliminated.

I believe that if the Quebec government went to the trouble of studying the system available to Toronto suburbanites, and since the federal government is always prepared to grant \$60 or \$62 million for such services, it would have every advantage in trying to instal such a system on existing lines instead of abandoning them and perhaps transferring them, as suggested in Bill C-221, to the responsibility of the province, the municipalities or non-profit organizations.

Mr. Speaker, as stated in this bill, the advisory board is not empowered to apply any of the decisions that it makes. It is also not empowered to take possession of land or to hand it over. I can only advise the government about railway matters, and it seems to me that ordinary citizens have other means to express their opinion besides this bill which I find ineffective. The provinces have the powers required to take over, by expropriation if need be, any line that they want to use as a transportation corridor. Under the authority of the municipal affairs department of each province, the municipalities can also expropriate if required.

According to our experience of line abandonment in the prairie provinces, we believe that in most cases, the best alternative would be to offer the land to the owner of the adjacent property. The procedure used is therefore generally to make the first offer to such people. However, to protect the public interest, provincial and municipal authorities hold priority if they have concrete projects for using railway rights-of-way. With regard to rights-of-way on Indian reserves, their priority interest is also considered. Maybe we will also have to decide to abandon railways lines but we must undertake studies before, as I said earlier, with a view to determining whether the province or railway companies with the support of the federal government could use those railways for rapid commuter trains.

In order to facilitate the transfer of land to the last landlords, the federal government has concluded an agreement with the railway companies for the transfer of most road beds which will be abandoned in the prairie provinces. So provincial committees have been set up to select the lines which local and provincial governments want and whose transfer they are prepared to facilitate. The federal government intends to transfer immediately the lands to the municipalities concerned or to the landowners of their choice. But on that point, Mr. Speaker, I strongly support the transfer to the Crown of all lands belonging to the federal government or to provincial governments. I believe that those lands should go back to the municipalities which are most able to use them and which best know the needs of their citizens and also the best ways to use those lands and those very old buildings. The proceeds of the sale of those lands will help compensate municipalities for any fiscal income they stand to lose.

● (1650)

Of course, municipalities have certainly lost tax revenues, and if we ever decided to use these buildings or railroads for other purposes, municipalities might then levy taxes on those buildings. The objects of that bill, Mr. Speaker, are perfectly in keeping with this approach to the issue. If a province considers that the site of a railroad might be used as a transportation corridor or for electric lines, it may submit a proposal to the special ad hoc provincial committee and be willing to pay a reasonable price for the land.

Likewise, groups interested to use abandoned road beds for recreative purposes can submit their proposal to the municipalities concerned. When two or more proposals are submitted for using the same road bed the municipality should have the last word. The residents directly concerned by the project will have a say in the decision through municipal representatives, rather than some remote organization in Ottawa. Mr. Speaker, we might also use organizations already in place like the union of municipalities and the union of district councils. Those organizations might certainly study the use of those railroads or lands abandoned as a result of technological developments.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, again I wish to congratulate the hon. member for having presented this bill. Of course, we share his concerns as regards the problems he has raised. However, we approach them in a different way, and the government considers that the provisions of this bill will not really meet its objectives. It recommends what it considers the most efficient and sensible approach, the one I just mentioned. Mr. Speaker, this is about all I had to say concerning this bill, my remarks were very short, but I wanted to emphasize the importance of the implementation of a railway system that would be really efficient and really beneficial to the residents of the Saint-Hyacinthe riding, and all south shore.

Mr. Gaston Isabelle (Hull): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak about Bill C-221 as I consider it an extremely interesting measure. I must thank its sponsor, the hon. member for Laprairie (Mr. Watson) as it deals to a certain extent with public transport. I fail to see why, in as modern a society as ours, which for years has been struggling with rapid transit problems, especially in densely and moderately populated cities, such means as are suggested in this bill cannot be used to improve the transit system. To my mind, that is extremely important. A few years ago, though I do not know much about transportation, I spent some time looking into the problem in urban areas. And in medicine, one often makes a rather quick diagnosis when a patient comes to the office.

I soon found out that transportation in our cities, whether it be Calgary, Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal or even Ottawa-Hull, is really sick. So, I shall prescribe one means of rapid public transit, a sort of monorail. A monorail of about a mile and a half should have been built, on a trial basis, in this area since this is the national capital; the Department of Transport