

Heritage Railway Stations

our history, a very important and unifying part. So these railway stations above all should be part of our cultural preservation concerns.

● (1740)

Heritage concerns have to be a major part of our cultural policy. We have to preserve the achievements of previous generations. It is not enough just to go after what artists have to contribute at the present time. What hope will they have that their works are going to be respected in the future if we do not show respect for the contributions of past generations? I very much support this Bill in principle, but I feel that we need to have a mechanism with which to deal with the preservation of railway buildings.

As to the specific amendment before us, I do have some queries as to whether the Bill should go to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Forestry and not be considered a heritage matter. While supportive of the intent of the Bill, I have to be critical of the Government's failure to bring forward a heritage policy as part of a general cultural policy for Canada. That is really the approach we should be following. We should not be dealing with the question of railway properties in isolation from other heritage matters. We need a comprehensive strategy and adequate funding. It is an important matter for Canadians and that is where our priorities should lie.

Mr. Jack Shields (Athabasca): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour to make a few remarks on Bill C-211, an Act to protect heritage railway stations. I want to compliment my colleague, the Hon. Member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor), for bringing forward this Bill today. I would be hesitant in referring the Bill to committee for discussion if I did not know that the Hon. Member for Bow River would be watching with his usual tenacity to ensure that it gets through that committee and back into the House with the objectives of this Bill met.

I have known the Hon. Member for Bow River for a number of years. I know he will understand when I point out to the House that all areas of my riding are affected by this Bill. As recently as last week the CNR, the Crown-owned company, applied to the Town of Lac La Biche to take down the old railway station which is now not being used. A number of people in the community got together and were hoping to convert it into a senior citizens' drop-in centre such as is presently in the Town of Athabasca. Within a matter of 12 to 14 hours, however, the CNR gave the order to demolish the railway station and that was done. That old building which sat in the middle of the Town of Lac La Biche is lost forever. People can remember going to the station when the train came through two times or maybe three times a week to watch the people getting on and off, to watch the unloading of the milk cans, and so on. The milk can stands were still there. All of those things were very much a part of the development of this country and that is why I salute my friend, the Hon. Member for Bow River, for bringing this Bill forward.

I would like to point out some of the things which can happen. The way the Town of Athabasca is situated, the

railroad station is a focal point at the end of Main Street. At one time it was going to be torn down but the people in the community got together and took over. They made an agreement with the Northern Alberta Railways, which was jointly run by CPR and CNR, and converted it to a senior citizens' drop-in centre. Any afternoon of the week one can drop in and not only live heritage but one can talk heritage to all of the senior citizens who make it a point to be there.

Again, I would like to compliment my colleague, the Hon. Member for Bow River. He has indeed performed a service to our communities. With his usual tenacity, I hope he will ensure that this Bill comes back to the House and is passed quickly so that we can protect our railway stations.

Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, may I also join with the Hon. Member for Athabasca (Mr. Shields) in complimenting the very distinguished senior member of this Chamber, the Hon. Member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor), on his initiative. It is certainly agreed that efforts should be made to preserve these buildings as cultural and social focal points for our communities, indeed for our provinces and our nation. I am sorry that the last speaker for the New Democratic Party has left the Chamber, but for the record I might explain that the reference of the subject matter of this Bill should be to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Forestry simply because that standing committee is the committee responsible for dealing with matters arising out of subject matters such as this.

Efforts towards the protection of buildings of heritage or historical significance should be guided, I believe, by four principles. The four significant principles I think we should touch on is, first, that all heritage buildings under federal jurisdiction, whether belonging to the railways, government departments, or Crown Corporations such as Air Canada and CBC, in fact should fall under one umbrella legislation and be the result of one policy. Treatment of each type of building by itself—for example, the railway stations—could lend itself to difficulties with other heritage sites. In theory we could have conflicting legislation which could make almost intractable, certainly very difficult, the enactment of legislation in other areas of equal importance.

Second, the responsibility for making decisions as to the heritage or historical significance of specific buildings should be assigned to an agency which is competent and qualified in the area of heritage and our history.

Third, the costs and liabilities of preservation of a building, after it is no longer required for its owner's purposes, should not be borne by its owner. Rather, the legislation might identify an appropriate agency which would be responsible for all costs and liabilities after the building had ceased to perform its primary or historical function. This agency may logically be the one which makes application for designation of the building as having heritage or historical significance.

Fourth, the legislation should prescribe time limits for each step of the entire process beginning with application for designation of heritage or historical significance, and proceeding all