

from the public purse. Unless there is a very compelling reason for secrecy, and if there is a compelling reason, members of the committee should be the first to see it, then the operating rules and the expenditures of public funds should be made known directly not only to representatives of the public but to members of the public themselves who should have the right to know on what their money is being spent. They should be able to judge for themselves, not just through the minds of their legislators whether or not those funds are being expended in the most wise and judicious manner.

That seems to me to be an argument that would be difficult to counter in any realistic way. I would hope that if the Government intends to vote against this amendment, which I think is exactly the same wording as Motion No. 52, the PC amendment, we would have at least some explanation other than a vote against our amendments from representatives of the Government.

In terms of the need of the public to know what is happening with respect to the expenditure of public funds and, further, as to whether or not public funds should be expended by the billions of dollars without some return coming to the public for its investment, I think it is worthwhile to take a look at some local experiences, not only within the West Kootenays but elsewhere: I hope other Members will look at the experiences they have had with the railways in their areas. All of us, at least in western Canada, have had experience from time to time with rail line abandonment applications. I know we have had two attempts to abandon a certain stretch of railway between Nakusp and New Denver in my constituency in 1974, 1975, 1976 and again in 1980-81. It has been interesting to take a look at what was demanded of the railway when ordered to maintain the line when the railway was ordered in the 1974-75 hearings to upgrade certain portions of it. In the intervening five or six years we were still left with a line to which, in the view of many of the participants in the 1980 hearings, virtually nothing of consequence had been done to comply with the orders of the CTC. If that is the continuing result—and I know from discussions with my colleagues that similar things have happened in areas right across the West and, I suspect, in the rest of Canada as well—then it is not enough to decide after the fact whether or not the taxpayers' funds that we turn over to the railway by the billions and billions of dollars have been expended for the purposes which not only were recommended but for the tasks which were ordered by the Government agency responsible. It is not enough to look five or six years later and say, "Did they do the job and did they expend the funds in the way that we told them those funds must be expended?" You need to have a mechanism. One of them is to ensure that you invest in equity for purposes of modernization and upgrading of the railways so that you have some direct voice. Hopefully, the voice will become more meaningful in the future than it has been in many cases in the past, especially in terms of the CN, to ensure that the purposes for which the public funds are expended are met and complied with.

Western Grain Transportation Act

Let me read from a submission of the Nakusp and District Chamber of Commerce to the abandonment hearings on September 19, 1980, where we find:

In our reviewing of past history, including the hearing of five years ago, it is evident that the CPR is continuing to defy past orders to improve this rail line plus they are trucking in fuel to the oil bulk plants and destroying what should be their own efforts to make the line pay.

● (1730)

It is just one example of the nightmare story of what has happened to the railways throughout the West over the past number of decades. They have made no effort to maintain many of their lines where for their own reasons they wanted to scrap or abandon them. As they did with passenger services on many occasions, they have done the same with freight lines. They have taken steps which tend to make rail lines look more uneconomic than they are so that they can be relieved of their proper responsibilities.

Surely it is an adequate argument to say that we must have access to the information and that we must be able to relay all information from investigative proceedings to the public we represent. Surely that is not too much to ask. We are being asked to spend billions of dollars of public money, tax dollars of hard working people, from one end of the country to the other. Surely we should insist upon having a direct voice in the management and decisions of the railways. Up to now many of their decisions have not been in the interests of the public. In fact, they have been diametrically opposed, especially when they have undermined in a very calculated way both the railway services and the communities they serve.

I hope Hon. Members opposite will give some explanation fairly soon as to why in certain circumstances they would be opposed to our amendments, unless of course they have had a change of heart and will support them.

Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry the Hon. Member for Portage-Marquette (Mr. Mayer) did not address himself to Motion No. 50 which, in this group of motions, is really the substantive one before the House.

In Motion No. 50 we are talking about the fact that the Bill provides a guaranteed income to railways but it does not guarantee particular services or reinvestment in railways. That guaranteed income is 20 per cent over operating costs, in laymen's language, and 20 per cent over the fixed and capital costs and return on investment, most of which we all know was made by taxpayers of Canada. In the case of CNR, all of it was made by the taxpayers; in the case of CPR, a major portion of it was provided by taxpayers.

Motion No. 50 puts some backbone into Clause 29 which deals with the ongoing capital investment of railways. Clause 29 requires that the railways indicate how much they will spend on improvements and capital investments during the next year. The Government is supposed to monitor this investment. Grain growers and taxpayers in Canada will provide a subsidy to the railways which, the implication is, they will use to increase the viability and quality of the grain transportation system. In this amendment we are asking for guarantees on