

*Railway Act*

The explanatory note then quotes from section 384 of the Railway Act. The first subsection of that section reads as follows:

Every railway, telegraph, telephone and express company and every carrier by water shall annually prepare returns, in accordance with the forms and classifications for the time being required by the board, of its assets, liabilities, capitalization, revenues, working expenditures and traffic.

About a year ago, perhaps in the spring when we thought this bill was to come before us, I had a conversation with statisticians of the Board of Transport Commissioners and of the Bureau of Statistics regarding the nature of these returns and the preparation of them, and I asked what would happen if such returns were brought forward in the house. It might be of some interest to hon. members if I took a moment or two to reveal some of the conversations I had.

The basis of the statistical information on the operations of railways, telegraph and telephone companies, and so on, used by the Board of Transport Commissioners in their work, which forms, the basic statistics used by the Bureau of Statistics for its purposes and for the purposes of anyone who wants to make use of them, comes through these statistical returns. That is why it was written into the act that the statistical returns must be made.

● (5:20 p.m.)

The procedure for filing these returns is approximately as follows. The forms are sent to the railways and other companies which are asked to make returns. Over the years they have built up into quite complex forms, some of them running into dozens of questions, and in the case of the railways into well over 100. The railways fill out the forms as required as soon as the year-end statistics have been compiled, and forward them to the Board of Transport Commissioners, who then proceed with the business of editing. You can realize, Mr. Speaker, that this is a complex matter, with returns of this kind. I might say that nine returns come from telegraph companies, about five from express companies, eighteen railways are involved and some six waterway companies on the Mackenzie river. All these companies send in the returns requested by the Board of Transport Commissioners. Not all the information sent in is exactly in the form which the Board of Transport Commissioners requires. Notes have to be sent back and forth, and so several months pass before the statistics can be obtained in a uniform style for analysis by the Board of Transport Commissioners. At the same time these

companies send to the Dominion Bureau of Statistics a complete set of the original returns and of the edited returns so that the bureau has the same information as is available to the Board of Transport Commissioners.

Some of the information which these companies are asked to submit is of a type that they certainly would not want to publish immediately with the year-end statement, because they are in competition with other carriers and enterprises. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it certainly would not be fair to approach these companies and say, "We have singled you out from among the corporate enterprises of Canada to force you to make returns under an act of parliament, although we do not ask other companies to make such returns, and these statistics will be revealed to the public and your competitors."

We would not do that. No parliament of Canada would do such a thing. Therefore these reports initially are given in confidence and are used by the Board of Transport Commissioners for compiling total statistics to indicate the progress of transportation, telegraph, communication and so on throughout the country. This is a very legitimate procedure and one that is valuable to us in maintaining all kinds of statistics and records in regard to the economic growth of the nation. So these are valuable returns for this particular purpose.

I think it would be very wrong of us to introduce into the Railway Act a section which suddenly altered the entire purport of the section of the act that is designed only for statistics gathering, and make it the means whereby we would bring a railway company or any company, as far as that goes, before a committee of the house for annual examination, when the company is not now brought before a committee of the house for examination under any other act.

It is proposed under this bill to bring the C.P.R. before the house for examination. It may be wise to do this in the long run, because it is indeed an important company, as my hon. friend suggests. But other ways ought to be found to do this and the matter should be debated in some other form than that in which we are today debating this bill.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I would not want to be a party to passing a measure of this kind which alters this section of the act in order to achieve an entirely different purpose than was originally intended.

My friend the hon. member for Burnaby-Richmond and I have just returned from a