

Transportation

Mr. Pickersgill: Would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes.

Mr. Pickersgill: I agree with what he has said, but isn't he disagreeing fundamentally with the hon. member for Northumberland who has been telling us we are going to have another slump?

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Chairman, I think it is only fair for me to comment that the minister uses this technique of interrupting my speeches with inconsequential questions that have nothing to do with what I am saying.

• (5:40 p.m.)

I am not talking about 1967. I am talking about the next 10, 20 or 30 years when this bill will bear on the economy of Canada. I do not think I can accept questions from the minister if he is going to take that attitude. I refer, in respect of this bill, to the fact that we have not learned the lessons we should have learned from the Canadian National-Canadian Pacific Act. In that act, following the Duff Commission, certain recommendations were made by parliament, thinking that they were leading the railways into a new age. Parliament asked the railways to correct all the mistakes of 40 years in respect of railway operations. Over and over again the statement is made in this act that they should adopt these proposals for efficiency in running the railways and reducing freight rates. Since the passage of that act in the mid 1930's, the railways have demonstrated that they have not paid any attention to this phrase "may recommend". Yet, through this whole bill we find the phrase "may recommend" repeated over and over again.

In drafting this bill I think the government has ignored the position we took on second reading that there should be some form of direction. I cannot draft the regulations. I cannot draft the amendments this afternoon, because there are so many clauses in the bill that are interlocked. I suggest that those who are responsible for the drafting of this bill, over the next few weeks, should take the time to redraft these clauses so that the minister can compare them to what the bill now says. If this new transportation commission is not going to make the same mistakes that were made 30 years ago, it must say that the board may direct. There is a big club we could use to enforce this direction. The club is the fact that we start out with large subsidies. Then, if you use the words "may direct" you can put

in a clause which says that if they do not follow the directions of the board, then the commission has the power to reduce the statutory subsidies.

I make these remarks with all the seriousness I can bring to bear, because although we do not want to run a dictatorship through the national transportation commission, I or any other layman who thinks back to the days of the Duff Royal Commission can point to scores of examples of inefficiency in the operation of our railways in western Canada. I have raised these questions in the committee. I have asked the men who know more about the shipment of grain in western Canada than anybody else in the world, the heads of the co-operative elevator companies, whether they are aware of the savings which could be made by better operation of our railways on the prairies. They all agreed that they were. These savings could have been made 30 years ago, if the Board of Transport Commissioners had had the power to direct. Now, with the subsidy in this bill, the Commission can be given the power to direct and the penalty for non-performance is the reduction of the subsidy.

I make these remarks, Mr. Chairman, in the belief that only the minister can bring his influence to bear on this. I do not think there is any use in attempting to tell this committee that the railways have learned their lesson and will run a rationalized railway system in western Canada on the basis of "may recommend". I pointed out in the committee that we know, from the figures we collected over the last 30 years, the number of bushels of grain per mile generated on the railway lines. We know that the line which had the second highest volume of grain per mile of any branch line in western Canada was involved in an application for abandonment. Once you have an application for abandonment, you must include in the application a willingness to sell it for its salvage value. The only reason anyone could advance that the second most used line in western Canada would be up for abandonment was the fact that the grain had to be back-hauled over 250 miles of prairies to Saskatoon and then back over the south line. This back-haul may have made the haulage of the grain less profitable. When you look at a map, however, and realize that 200 miles of the back-haul could be saved by routing the grain across a bridge belonging to another railway company, you realize the savings which could be made.