

Canadian National Railways

Speaker. The Acting Minister of Transport obviously feels that he is hardly in a position to go further, other than to give such a tentative outline of what he personally thinks will happen. One would have thought that during the last two days the acting minister would have taken this matter up with the Minister of Transport and other officials of the department to see whether they were prepared to go beyond the simple voicing of a personal opinion, to the point where they would agree to the inclusion of such a desirable proposal—I am using the minister's words—in statute law.

In recent months, Mr. Speaker, we have heard more and more about the problem of poverty in our country, about the inter-regional disparities in income and the inter-regional disparities in job opportunities. We are now faced with a bill to provide for the building of a line of railway in the northern part of Alberta. One assumes that this is an area where job opportunities for the local Indian population are not that easy to come by.

If one wanted to do something tangible and concrete about this problem. Mr. Speaker, rather than resorting to studies and still more studies under the aegis of the Economic Council, under the aegis of ARDA, of FRED and a host of other government agencies, studies that have been proliferating over the last few years, we now have an opportunity to do something specific through the vehicle of this bill. Poverty remains as a cruel fact, and we are doing little in a tangible way to tackle the problem.

I do not know whether other hon. members would agree with this, Mr. Speaker, but when we do have the chance to do something specific and tangible to get at the problem of low employment opportunities in certain parts of the country it does seem a pity if we do not take that opportunity. This bill gives us the chance to act. The Minister without Portfolio agrees that it is a good idea; why not do something, then?

I see that the Minister of Transport has left the chamber, and probably has the attitude that "he is all right, Jack". He does not care; he has gone. The Minister without Portfolio, who is acting for him here, is hardly in a position to say much about this proposal. Again I repeat that one can hardly blame the Minister without Portfolio for this situation.

There were some other questions put to the minister two days ago, Mr. Speaker, which the acting minister cannot possibly answer. One of the questions put previously was why

the Minister of Transport, after the passage of seven or eight months, could not come to a decision about the validity of certain claims having to do with a line of railway built by the C.N.R. some few years ago. This was an important matter which was raised two years ago, and since then the Minister of Transport has been dealing with or procrastinating on the question. The Minister without Portfolio from Winnipeg South is hardly in a position to answer that particular question.

I do not know at this stage, Mr. Speaker, what more can be said, except to express indignation at the fact that when the bill comes before us for third reading the minister has not given some tangible response to the questions asked, and that he has left the chamber. What is one to do?

● (3:40 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker: Are there any further questions?

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, a few moments ago the Prime Minister said that the opposition was confused about how to ask questions, and I agree that that is true. Questions ought to be directed to the right minister, and in that I do not disagree with the Prime Minister. I submit the Acting Minister of Transport is in an odd position since he was, so to speak, handed a bill he did not expect to guide through the house. He has said that the Minister of Transport would be back here to discuss this matter. The Minister of Transport came in and left, and the question is, who is responsible for the bill, and who will guide it through the house? I appreciate the acting minister's words. I believe if he were head of the department worth-while action would flow from our discussions. I am not sure that, in our actual situation here, that will be so. The Minister of Transport may return to the chamber but he may leave to the acting minister the actual carrying out of certain proposals.

One problem I wish to speak about is that pertaining to the employment of local people—that is, people local to an area where a contract is being carried out. Clause 2 of this bill sets out the method of tendering, and what Canadian National must do in relation to contracts. We in this group suggest that in the areas where work is to be done, as far as possible local people should be hired to undertake some part of the construction. I think the minister is sympathetic to this idea. All the