

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS

[Translation]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It being five o'clock, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private member's bills on the order paper of today, namely public bills, private bills and notices of motion.

Mr. Pinard: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard) on a point of order.

Mr. Pinard: I request the unanimous consent of the House so we may proceed to consideration of Bill C-222.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent of the House that we proceed to consideration of Bill C-222?

● (1702)

[English]

Is there unanimous consent to call Bill C-222 and to suspend consideration of all the items appearing on the order paper before that bill?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

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RAILWAY ACT

MEASURE RESPECTING OWNERSHIP OF LAND WHERE RAILWAY LINE ABANDONED

Mr. G. H. Whittaker (Okanagan Boundary) moved that Bill C-222, to amend the Railway Act (ownership of land where railway line abandoned), be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is self-explanatory. It is to provide that railway rights of way revert to the Crown when they are no longer used by railway companies.

There are five major reasons for the introduction of this bill:

1. The selling of these rights of way would effectively close transportation corridors which might well be needed in future years.

2. The Government of Canada has made monumental concessions to the railways in this country. Land and tax benefits were given freely to the railways in return for cross-Canada transportation service and now, when these lines are abandoned, the property should revert to the government as partial payment for those early concessions.

3. Today, through a CPR subsidiary company, Marathon Realty, large sums of money are being made from roughly one million acres of land originally granted by the Canadian government to the CPR and still held by the company.

Railway Lands

4. The original mandate of the CPR was to provide transportation on an ongoing basis to all parts of Canada. That mandate is no longer being followed.

5. Through abandonment, the railway companies are making large financial gains selling property in urban areas at the expense of the Canadian people.

I was very happy when my motion on this topic was discussed in the House and given support in principle. Indeed, the hon. member for Scarborough East (Mr. O'Connell) said he would support the basic principle of the motion; he went even further by undertaking to support the bill when it came before the House. He stated he would support the measure in order to bring it to committee where its ramifications could be closely studied. He also indicated that the government's position was one of support in principle for the bill.

In two instances the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) supported the idea. With reference to a specific incident of abandonment authorized by the Canadian Transport Commission, he said:

The Government of Canada would then, after consultation with the provinces, offer the land to the provincial Crown involved for ultimate disposition to a local municipality, or we would offer it for sale as soon as possible to adjacent farm land owners.

Responding to a brief by the three prairie provinces' transport ministers, he said:

Where any land is in fact abandoned, the roadbed property should revert automatically to the federal Crown.

The hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. Holt) also made her views known in strong support of my motion on the reversion of rights. Indeed the hon. member suggested that the CPR is no longer a railway but "a front for exploitation of other interests in this country." She said:

The railway is simply there to further CP's moneymaking, and, I will go so far as to say, greed . . . I know the reputation of the railway, specifically the Canadian Pacific, which has taken so much of what should be the property of Canadians.

Hon. members may agree that that is strong language to direct against a major Canadian company.

I should also like to call the attention of the House to a news clipping from the Vancouver *Province* dated December 2, 1977. The clipping states that Canada's two major railways have made a secret pact with Ottawa to turn over all abandoned prairie railways to the federal government. According to this article, an agreement supposedly released by Alberta transport minister Hugh Horner shows CN and CP rail as having agreed to turn over to Ottawa all railway rights of way abandoned on or after August 5. Under the terms of the agreement the federal government would not pay for land but the railways would be paying mines and mineral rights. Urban rights of way and adjacent rail lands were excluded from the agreement. The only part of the agreement I question is this: why was it kept secret?

There has been speculation that the federal transport ministry has been waiving it under provincial noses to support the contention that railbeds belong to the federal government. I should also like to point out that Mr. Justice Hall, in the Hall Commission Report on grain handling and railways in western