

Supply—Agriculture

railways, especially in western Canada. It goes without saying that abandonment of branch lines should be subject to a thorough study and investigation from the standpoint of the costs of such abandonment to the individuals, municipalities and communities concerned.

The Deputy Chairman: Order. I apologize for interrupting the hon. member for Lisgar but I am having some difficulty relating what he is saying now to the first item of the agriculture estimates.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): With great respect, Mr. Chairman, I am glad you brought this to my attention because the abandonment of branch lines throughout western Canada is going to impose a severe strain on agriculture, particularly the great grain growing areas of the three prairie provinces. Aside from what I have already said, it is my intention to relate my remarks directly to the agricultural community. I have no intention of bringing in commercial enterprises or others that may be affected by such a move.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Chairman, on the point of order, I think it should be made clear at this time, when the hon. member for Lisgar is making these remarks, that railway line abandonment has been put under the Minister of Agriculture in so far as the committee on organizing rational abandonment is concerned. Therefore I suggest that anything in connection with railway line abandonment can be properly discussed under item 1.

Mr. McIlraith: I wonder whether I could be heard on the point of order. The hon. member for Qu'Appelle stated that the Minister of Agriculture has responsibility over rail line abandonment. If he will check more carefully I think he will find that the legislation has not yet been dealt with by the house and the Minister of Agriculture does not have that responsibility. It has been announced that he will have it after the legislation is passed.

What in effect is happening is that the hon. member for Lisgar in his remarks is attempting to anticipate the content of the railway legislation to be based on the resolution now on the order paper. That is the nub of the difficulty and, as the hon. member will appreciate, it is improper to answer him or discuss this subject because to do so would be to disclose the content of the legislation to the committee before it has been presented to the house. I am aware of the keen interest of the farmers of western Canada in this subject, but for that reason I suggest, with great deference, that this stage of these proceedings is not the place to discuss this very important

subject, and that it is a matter for discussion under item 16 of the order paper.

Mr. Baldwin: On the point of order, Mr. Chairman, I think this should be said. I would probably agree with the minister that we should not go into too great detail. However, from time immemorial in this country the Crownsnest pass rates have been one of the basic foundations and cornerstones of the prosperity of western farmers, and I think it is notorious that the briefs presented by most of the agricultural associations and bodies of western Canada have pointed out how deeply affected individual farmers will be, because by reason of branch line abandonment many of the benefits that flow to them will be lost or at least seriously diminished in that railway line abandonment will add to the costs of the farmers. Consequently I submit with great respect that at least to the extent of a general application a member who discusses the possible effect of branch line abandonment at this time falls well within the ambit of item No. 1 and has the right to do so.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): Mr. Chairman, I was not attempting to anticipate legislation. What I was attempting to do was to bring to the attention of the minister responsible the very serious effects—I am sure that as a westerner he will agree with me—that the indiscriminate abandonment of branch lines is going to have on the farming community. However, I will shorten my statement in that regard to meet the wishes of the committee. I should like to continue only to the point where I can tie in rail line abandonment with the problems it creates for the farmers. Branch lines have been, and at least for the foreseeable future, will continue to be an integral part of our transportation system. Here is where I relate the matter to agriculture. The grain handling facilities made possible by their existence contribute to one of the most efficient marketing complexes now in operation. If lines are abandoned, naturally the railways will get the grain anyway at larger centres, but by doing so they are shifting the responsibility and the cost of marshalling the grain for export to the taxpayers of the provinces and the municipalities, who will have to assume the added burden and responsibility of building and maintaining highways and roads, and particularly to the farmers who will be faced with extra storage and delivery costs.

Earlier I mentioned there was no doubt that the railways would get this grain anyway at the larger centres. However, in so far