

Canadian National Railways

contingencies the railway has to meet when its operations are not profitable.

My hon. friend, the Minister without Portfolio, at the resolution stage, said that if the house so desired, this bill would be sent to the standing committee on transportation and communications. I, of course, propose to carry out that undertaking if hon. members feel this is still necessary after the explanation I have given and any answers I give to questions they might wish to put in their speeches on second reading. However, Mr. Speaker, it did seem to me that because of the very simplicity of the bill and the urgency of getting it through both houses, because the railway cannot start its operations until that has been done, perhaps—I did consult my hon. friend for Saint John-Albert (Mr. Bell), who was the one who raised the question the other day—its referral to committee might not be necessary. The hon. member made no commitment, of course, but I would hope that with a view to getting on with this project and not losing any part of this construction season, hon. members would be inclined to proceed with the committee stage right here in the house and send the bill on to the other place.

Mr. Thomas M. Bell (Saint John-Albert): Mr. Speaker, may I ask the minister a question on the matter of referring the bill to committee? Has it not been the procedure in the past to allow railway construction to begin and refer the bill to committee later?

Mr. Pickersgill: I think the law is—I know I should hesitate in dealing with the law, (a) not being a lawyer and (b) because it is perhaps in breach of the rules—that Canadian National Railways cannot build one inch more than four miles of railway without the prior approval of parliament. I have suggested to the railway they can take all the steps necessary short of asking for bids. In fact I have told them that I do not think they should even do that, because Canadian National Railways does not want to be in contempt of parliament.

Mr. Bell (Saint John-Albert): With regard to whether this bill should be referred to committee, the procedure, at least for quite a way back in my memory, has been that all these bills have gone to committee. At that time we have the advantage of maps and explanations of the company officials. The minister said there are some problems, in so far as delay is concerned, which have to be considered. Some of us might go along with

that suggestion. The Committee on Transport and Communications is busy on some other duties. I also have in mind the fact that the C.N.R., who are involved in this matter, will probably appear before a committee before too long and these questions could be asked at that time, although that time might be too far advanced for our questions to be effective. However, it would give members interested an opportunity to study the geography of the area in question.

I think there is a slight danger here. It is an uncontroversial bill and is perhaps routine, but responsibilities have attached to the construction of new branch lines in the past and we would want to be fully assured that Bill No. C-165 is exactly the same as others of a similar nature which have come before us. I really have not anything too specific to ask. From the minister's statement we have an idea of the plans and the usual guarantees. It might be bad precedent if the C.N.R. were allowed to have bills put through without being referred to committee, because last year for example a bill in connection with the C.P.R. line at Esterhazy, Saskatchewan, was considered in committee for a very long time; it was controversial to the extent that every possible question was asked about this private company and its intentions. Therefore we have to be careful that we do not give a better break, in so far as our responsibilities are concerned, to the government company and allow it to have an easier time, as it were.

I should like to ask the minister how far the work has progressed. I take it from the minister's statement that it has not progressed very far.

Mr. Pickersgill: The work has not been started.

Mr. Bell (Saint John-Albert): Then, Mr. Speaker, subject to one or two questions that might arise later when we deal with the bill in committee of the whole house, I am satisfied that this bill be given second reading.

Mr. Norman Fawcett (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, I wish to say only a few words on this subject. As a former member of the Canadian National Railways family I am happy to see that Canadian National are again pioneering in going into this area. I should also like to say that, having been a long time resident in northern Ontario, I am happy to see the railway opening up another section of this part of the province. I shall not get into any of the technicalities that