

Branch Railway Lines

minister has made to the policy as set forth in the resolution.

Mr. Knowles: He is the minister of euphemism.

Mr. Fisher: Yes, he is the minister of euphemism, all right. I would like to suggest to the minister that some time, surely, during the proceedings, if not at the second reading stage then perhaps when the railway committee is hearing the evidence and examining the bill, we should get from him some idea as to what is the government's transportation policy. A lot of people are very much interested in this. I can think of the trucking industry, the people who are involved in pipe lines, all the railway workers across the country, who would still like to have some impression of where this government stands with regard to some of the problems that are facing them.

So far as our party is concerned, we will not call any division at the resolution stage, but we are certainly sceptical enough of this legislation, from what we can see of it, to anticipate that we shall probably be speaking against it, or speaking against substantial parts of it, and voting, probably, against the legislation when it comes in. This is not put forward as any kind of threat that we are going to drag things out, but it is quite apparent that there are a number of items in the legislation revealed by the resolution that are unsatisfactory, to say the least.

One of the things that I do not think has really struck home to the people across the country generally is this. I do not think they realize what a drastic change we have had. We have had a freight rates system building up for decades; a freight rates system handled by the board of transport commissioners. We all know the tremendous number of hearings and the long attempts that were made, particularly in the 1950's and a few years ago, to equalize the freight rates, to try to make the system one that is practical and adjustable. Despite any of the vicious or mean things that might be left in the freight rates system at the present time, it was viable and it was working. Now we have to start off with a completely new slate in so far as freight rates are concerned, because the essence of what the minister and the government have plucked out of the royal commission's recommendations is opening up the whole area to competition. This sounds great; there is nothing better than competition and laws and rules in the market place to give you the best in transportation. However, I

[Mr. Fisher.]

happen to come from an area that has been subsidized substantially by the bridge subsidy. I would like to give the minister an example of what happened recently with the pick up in the transportation out of our area of basic commodities. The \$7 million had to be spread a lot thinner. As a consequence, in effect there was a substantial rise in the rates of certain commodities, particularly lumber. The railways, without any hesitation, went in and applied this rate despite the fact that its application immediately made much of that exportation of lumber out of our area uneconomical. We are still hoping we can stave off the increase. It has been postponed several times. But this gives you an idea of the tremendous economic pressure many parts of our country suffer when they have not competition.

We cannot get competitive transportation in the sense in which they have it in southern and northern Ontario. I do not believe we get it really on the prairies, as yet. Yet this is going to be the *carte blanche* that is given to this new set-up as far as we can make it out—the abolition of the freight rates structure as we know it. I suggest that, inadequate as the structure may have been, despite all the difficulties in connection with it, we are really throwing out a great deal for something that is most indefinite. I am somewhat hesitant of making a fetish out of or bowing to the shrine of free enterprise and competition in contemplation of what may be possible.

I suggest to the minister that if the legislation follows through and is introduced, what we will have here—and members had better remember this—is more delegations and more representations than we have ever had before when the new freight rates are applied and the railways put their rates on a so-called economic or competitive basis. This is one of the reasons why we want to look at that particular section most closely.

I certainly intend to call before the committee a couple of Canadian experts on freight rates, people who have had experience with them. I know at least two of them who have worked in the field for a number of years, and they think this proposal is absolutely fantastic. I refer to the proposal to suddenly throw away the whole structure, all for the sacred principle of competition. One of the other questions that the commission dealt with was this. I remember that when I appeared before the commission I put this first question to them. One of the fundamental issues we faced was, are we to throw open competition