

Railway Lands

He made some good points. He mentioned the Hall report was not being implemented soon enough. The Conservative criticism of the Hall report is careful not to spell out either their concerns or their endorsements. They are also careful not to mention the positive steps, actions and announcements which have taken place and which were outlined so capably by my hon. friend from Assiniboia (Mr. Goodale) earlier this afternoon. They did not enjoy the comments of the hon. member for Assiniboia. My friend took 20 minutes in this debate; he could have taken a good deal longer to elaborate if time had permitted. It did require more time to outline all of the moves which have taken place and which have been enacted by this government in response to the Hall commission report.

The bill proposes that the rights-of-way of railroad beds of abandoned lines should revert to the federal Crown. With respect to Saskatchewan, the branch lines in that province are probably in a different situation from some of the lines my friend from the Okanagan valley might have in his province. It might make a good deal of sense to retain some lines in that part of British Columbia in the name of the federal Crown for perhaps years. But I doubt, Mr. Speaker, if that is the case in many situations in the provinces of Saskatchewan, Alberta or Manitoba. Most of these lines have been dealt with through the full abandonment process of the Canadian Transport Commission. Mostly these are branch lines and lines which have not been used to any great degree, and they are not likely to be used again in future, at least in terms of rail corridors. British Columbia in that respect could be different and on that point I am certainly not able to argue with my hon. friend.

In the majority of instances it will be the farmer or the cattleman who has had those tracks crossing his land over the years. He will be the logical person to own or have control over that particular land. It seems to me that it is appropriate to give that land to the federal Crown so they can move expeditiously to put that land into the hands of the farmer or the ranch owner through the municipality.

I do not think there is any group of people or body of elected officials in the prairie provinces, and I am sure it is true across the country, who are more capable and qualified to make the decision, Mr. Speaker, as to who should receive that right-of-way land. The Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, which is made up of almost 2,000 members of every political stripe and party, has endorsed this government wholeheartedly and opposes strenuously the recommendation of Mr. Justice Hall that rights-of-way first of all go to the provincial Crown.

Part of that opposition might be explained by the difficulties they have encountered with the present minister of transportation in the present government of Saskatchewan. The minister has been imposing various weight restrictions and other limitations on roads in the province. Perhaps it is their mistrust of that minister that brings about this particular approach. Surprisingly enough, the municipal people in Alberta and Manitoba have also endorsed the action of the federal Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) in seeking that agreement which is now signed and public. There is nothing secret about it. The

[Mr. McIsaac.]

rights-of-way when these lines are finally abandoned will revert to the federal Crown, for disposition as the municipalities see fit. The municipalities are losing considerable tax revenue from the loss of this land. It is worth pointing out that the return from the sale of this land will go to the municipalities, not the railroads or the federal Crown.

All hon. members opposite I am sure would endorse that particular aspect of this policy, which is meeting with the approval not only of municipal officials across the prairies but all farm groups in every province. Recently at a meeting in the province of Quebec the Canadian Federation of Agriculture endorsed the federal minister's proposals with respect to ownership of the rights-of-way of such land.

We have yet to see any tracks abandoned since the Hall report has been presented. I am aware of the fear, concern and apprehension that for many years has been shown particularly by members of the New Democratic party in some provinces. This issue that they have been worrying about for so long covering something like 14,000 miles of rail line in western Canada has now largely been cleared up and clarified right through the year 2000. There will be a period of indecision as to whether another 2,000 miles of line will be retained, rebuilt or abandoned after some four or five years.

I am pleased to endorse this bill. I point out that it is purely superfluous because of the action of the government and the Minister of Transport. This bill is not required in my riding—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member. The time allotted to the consideration of private members' business has expired. I do now leave the Chair until eight o'clock.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

● (2002)

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BANK ACT

AMENDMENT TO EXTEND OPERATION TO APRIL 1, 1979

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. MacEachen (for the Minister of Finance) that Bill C-16, to amend the Bank Act and the Quebec Savings Banks Act, be read the third time and do pass.

Mr. Bob Brisco (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, earlier today when discussing the proposal to give the revision of the Bank Act a one year hoist, I indicated that I had very serious