

Government Orders

What we have here is essentially a housekeeping bill to regularize an anomalous and undesirable situation which has a bearing on the Central Western Railway that purchased a section of the CN subdivision at Stettler, Alberta.

I am sure that members opposite wish to rise and speak to this bill. They are familiar with what is taking place. I know that the people of the Central Western Railway have actually been talking to each one of us on both sides of the House concerning this piece of legislation.

I ask for the co-operation of members opposite in making sure that this bill gets speedy passage.

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in my place and respond to the remarks of the parliamentary secretary on Bill C-5.

I respond quite openly and quite honestly in saying to the parliamentary secretary, and indeed to the minister who has just come into the House, that up until very recent days it was the perception of the Official Opposition that Bill C-5 is as the parliamentary secretary describes essentially, in parliamentary language, a housekeeping measure, one designed to bring the CWR into a position in legislative terms equal to that of all other short-line railways in the country.

I have to point out to my colleague opposite, and I do so in good faith, that in very recent days we on this side of the House have heard from the representatives of workers at the CWR. They have expressed some concerns about this bill, concerns that heretofore we were not familiar with. In fact I hold in my hand copies of some correspondence that was written to the Minister of Transport on May 30 by the United Transportation Union.

This letter points out some concerns about Bill C-5 and the impact of its passage on the position of that union which is now for various and sundry reasons before the courts in terms of determining the proper jurisdiction of the railway and of the union with respect to CWR.

It is for that reason that we in the Official Opposition, because we are interested in ensuring that every voice that should be heard is heard, cannot give approval today to the passage of Bill C-5 at all stages.

What we would petition the government opposite to do, as well as colleagues in other parties, is to support the motion to send this bill to a legislative committee so that all of us in this House—in particular all those on the transport committee, my colleague for Kenora—Rainy River, our labour critic, and others—can participate in an examination of the bill and give those most directly affected by the bill, in this case the employees, an opportunity to be heard.

I say to my colleagues opposite that having provided that opportunity and having given everybody a chance to be heard on this bill then certainly we will co-operate to see its passage if there are not significant problems. On the other hand, if there are problems that we ought to be aware of I hope this House and the transport committee in their wisdom will deal with those problems and that the minister will respond in an appropriate way.

Mr. Cid Samson (Timmins—Chapleau): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise today and speak on Bill C-5, an act to amend the Railway Act.

This legislation that we are dealing with has far more reaching consequences than what my hon. colleague on the government side would lead us to believe. This bill deals not only with providing a private company, the Central Western Railway Corporation, with a clean legislative bill of health but, more important, with the future of all railway workers who would find themselves in a situation where private interests would purchase short-line railways from transportation companies such as the Canadian National.

I dare not treat this matter lightly, no matter what the arguments from the other side may be, for many reasons. First, the government's track record when it comes to railways leaves a lot to be desired. We have witnessed that just lately with the types of cuts that have taken place to the VIA Rail lines and the kind of service that is left.

Some areas are being left out in the cold with secondary type service and with the likes of a bud car, particularly in my riding which is supposed to run on a three days in and three days out per week basis. In December we saw that it ran six times in the whole month. It kind of makes one wonder just exactly what this government's intention really is *vis-à-vis* railroads.