

Branch Railway Lines

the committee would hear representations from all seriously interested bodies. I may say that as the minister primarily responsible for this legislation, it would be my view that I should listen most carefully to all representations and bring to the attention of my colleagues any serious suggestions for amendment of the legislation that in the light of those representations might seem to be more in the public interest than what is being recommended. No one can be all wise about as difficult and complex a subject as this, and certainly the government does not pretend to be. I do not think the royal commission did, either. If through our collective wisdom in the committee or in the house we can provide more effectively for the future of the railways, we will seek to do so in the course of this legislation.

I think I should just say, in conclusion, that notwithstanding the tremendous development of road transportation, of transportation by air and other forms of transport, particularly the tremendous increase in the volume of inland water transport which has taken place since the opening of the St. Lawrence seaway, the railways still do represent a very important element in the whole Canadian economy. It is essential that we have efficient railway service in this country, not only to transport goods from one part of the country to another but, in a country which still depends for about one fifth of its income on sales outside the country, it is of the utmost importance that our railways should be both efficient and competitive, not only with other forms of transport in Canada but with transport elsewhere in the world, so that we may continue to derive from the rest of the world that one fifth, that 20 cents of every dollar, of the income of the average Canadian that comes from sales abroad.

It is our view that it is of great importance that we should give the railways an opportunity to operate as efficiently and as economically as possible and avoid adding unduly to fixed charges that are imposed upon the taxpayers and that inevitably have to be paid for and are therefore a minus factor in the economy. At the same time we must remember that the railways are large employers of labour; that the interests of the employees of the railways, our fellow citizens, must not be overlooked; and that, though change is essential in this field if the railways are to compete and receive a reasonable share of the traffic which will enable them to maintain their services out

[Mr. Pickersgill.]

of their revenues, we must at the same time see that we do not, because of changes for which they have no responsibility whatsoever, visit hardships that are not reasonable and bearable upon a large section of the Canadian population. I think, sir, on that note I should conclude what I have to say at this stage of the proceedings.

Mr. Olson: Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask the minister whether he could give some indication, or perhaps even assurance, that after the bill is referred to the committee there will be sufficient time—I am thinking in terms of at least six weeks; perhaps two months—allowed before witnesses are called, so that the people concerned, and primarily the three prairie provincial governments, will have time to prepare their case.

Mr. Pickersgill: Mr. Chairman, I do think any reasonable suggestion of that kind would be acceded to very readily by the government. I would rather hope that it might be possible to go on quite soon, after the first reading, with the debate on second reading of the bill. Suggestions have been made that even the second reading should be delayed for a long period. I do not think that would really serve any particularly useful purpose; I believe it would be desirable to have the second reading of the bill and then have it before the committee. But I do not think we should, in committee, act in such a way as to make it difficult for any organizations or individuals who have serious contributions to make, to make them in the way they want to make them. I would certainly be very happy indeed to consider any reasonable requests for delays in these matters; but I think there should be an interval, perhaps after second reading, before the committee even undertakes its task—unless perchance there are a number of organizations that are ready to proceed, because I think these proceedings will take a long time. If a number of organizations are ready to proceed, perhaps a start could be made and then there could be an interval, if it was required by any of those seriously interested. Certainly, Mr. Chairman, if I may make a very bad pun, the government has no thought of trying to railroad this legislation at any stage.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Chairman, I think there must be a realization in the minds of all of us that the introduction of this bill, into the house is a very historic occasion. Railway legislation and the problems that go along with railway construction and management