

Supply—Transport

are engaged before the royal commission. Meanwhile they are conducting an investigation or a study into the waybill structure. That is a considerable study. It is a matter that is going to take some time because it has never been done in Canada. My information is that it has never been done in the United Kingdom or in the United States, and it is a big job. The board of transport commissioners inform me that until they have that study completed it is impossible to deal with equalization of the freight rates structure across Canada. I do not think I can go any further than to tell my hon. friend that it is the intention to proceed with the investigation. There has not been one since 1926; and the board and the government feel that there should be one now.

Mr. Green: Then the situation is that, after the royal commission on transportation has reported, the board of transport commissioners will proceed with the general inquiry into the whole freight rates structure. Am I to understand from the minister that that is the plan?

Mr. Chevrier: It is; and more than that, they are proceeding now.

Mr. Green: Oh, well—

Mr. Chevrier: They are proceeding now with the waybill study which is a matter that is taking some time.

Mr. Green: Have the provinces taken the position that they will make representations to the board of transport commissioners on this general inquiry?

Mr. Chevrier: I cannot answer that; but I would think they would want to make representations.

Mr. Green: Is the minister satisfied that the board of transport commissioners is strong enough to conduct a thorough and worth-while inquiry? And has the board a strong enough staff to enable it to carry out a proper inquiry? As we all know, in 1948 the commissioners made a decision which was reversed by the cabinet, and last year they made a decision which was reversed by the Supreme Court of Canada. They are now in difficulty again over their recent decision. I am asking the minister whether he believes that the board of transport commissioners as set up at the present time and the staff are strong enough adequately to deal with this freight rate question by way of a general investigation.

Mr. Chevrier: I am firmly of that view. I think it is borne out by the fact that the board of transport commissioners in 1926 conducted a fairly good examination into the freight rates structure of Canada at that time. I think it was called an equalization of freight rates

then. From the point of view of staff, freight rate experts, statistical experts and the like, I would say that the board is in a stronger position today than it was then. It is not for me to compare the personnel of the board today with the personnel of the board in those earlier days. I would not attempt to do so. But since my hon. friend asked me for my opinion, I say that I am of the view that they can conduct a fair and thorough investigation at this time.

Mr. Coldwell: In view of all that has been said with regard to freight rates and transportation generally, both here and across the country, it seems to me that the time has come when the government and the House of Commons should consider what can be done for the whole transportation system of this country. What I mean is this. We are discussing this matter piecemeal. We are not facing the difficulties. I do not want to say anything that I should not say at the moment because of the inquiries that are now going on. But having regard to the proposals made by the president of the Canadian National Railways a few days ago, with the uneasiness all across the country and particularly on the prairies and British Columbia with regard to the increases in the freight rates, with the decline in railway traffic and the competition that has come to the railways by way of trucks picking up the most profitable business, and the dependence that we have in some parts of the country for the removing of our heavy commodities like wheat, coal and so on, it seems to me that the time has come when the House of Commons and the government of the country should face up to this whole transportation problem and try to straighten out the discriminations that exist, and which are oppressive, and try to have a real transportation policy for this country that would give us a chance of having freight rates and so on that would be within the reach of the people. I think the time has come when we must consider transportation not as a matter of railway rates but as a matter of integration of all our various transportation facilities, with a view to finding a solution for this grave problem; for grave it is when you see the manner in which deficits have piled up over the years when times have not been as prosperous as they were during the war years.

Mr. Chevrier: I do not think there is much fault I could find with what the leader of the C.C.F. party has said. I would point out to him, however, that the difficulty lies in the fact that if you have a general over-all policy on general transportation matters you then enter the provincial field. You must of necessity do that.

Mr. Coldwell: Yes, of course.