

Railway Rights-of-Way

before taking steps to get rid of them and selling them piecemeal. A means should be provided whereby they can be protected for future public use and the recreational use of all Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Pinard (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, it is regrettable that there are only a few minutes left because I would have many things to say about such an interesting subject. Knowing that a bill will be debated after the study of this motion is over, I have no scruples at all in using the remainder of the time allotted to me to express my point of view on this motion even if I have to watch for the time when that bill comes up for debate.

As for the motion before this House tonight, it aims at amending the Railways Act which may seem in itself a rather simple matter at first sight, but which is in fact so complex and full of implications that it would not be appropriate to pass this amendment. Theoretically, section 88 of the Railways Act gives the railway companies the right to dispose of lands which have been acquired as subsidies from the Crown in the manner they deem appropriate. According to this amendment, rights-of-way acquired by railway companies through subsidies would revert to the federal government. Although this proposal is undoubtedly well grounded, the identification of the subsidies and these lands obtained through these very subsidies is truly a complicated matter. The Hall Commission report recommends that following any abandonment of railways, all such tracts of land revert to provincial governments. However,

this bill recommends that they be turned over to the federal government, a matter which upsets the provinces. In short, we are still studying the impact of the Hall Commission report, the concerns of the provinces and the consequences stemming from the transfer to the federal government of lands abandoned by the railways. Given the complex historical process of land acquisition by the railways, the concerns expressed by the provinces and the delays necessary to ensure a fair sharing of these lands, it does not seem appropriate to solve these problems through legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the motion before the House would amend the Railways Act so that rights-of-way originally obtained through federal subsidies would revert to the Crown.

It is a complex and gigantic task to try to determine which rights-of-way were originally obtained through federal subsidies and the nature of railway construction at that time as well as the various forms of subsidies given to an unbelievable number of small railway companies, several of which have now disappeared, while others exist only on paper. To follow up this motion, one would have to—

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Question!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but the time allotted to private members' business has now expired.

It being five o'clock, the House stands adjourned until Monday next at two o'clock p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 2(1).

At 5 p.m. the House adjourned, without question put, pursuant to Standing Order.