

Canadian National Railways

parliament as a suppliant in connection with his own line in Alberta and we co-operated to the fullest extent. As far as the hon. gentleman is concerned I think it would be better if he were to remain silent and allow me to put these questions to the minister.

Mr. Smallwood: Mr. Chairman, I rise on a point of order. I think this is a serious situation. The hon. member for Laurier, a distinguished parliamentarian and a member of the legal profession, after four years is still unable to distinguish between the hon. member for Jasper-Edson and his brother, the hon. member for Acadia.

Mr. Pickersgill: They are identical twins.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): That is not a point of order. It is a point of confusion.

Mr. Chevrier: The minister just stated that this rate has been filed with the board of transport commissioners which is a public body, a court of record. Anybody can go to the board and obtain this information. Why cannot parliament be given information concerning freight rates, which information is in possession of the board?

Mr. Balcer: Parliament can have this information when the freight rate is filed with the board.

Mr. Chevrier: The minister has already said it was filed with the board.

Mr. Balcer: May I point out to the hon. member that this information was available yesterday in the standing committee. The experts were present at the meeting and all hon. members of the committee were allowed to ask these questions. The experts would have been extremely pleased to answer these inquiries.

I should be pleased to give this information to the committee if I had it before me, but it is physically impossible for me to give it because I do not have it before me. It would have been very easy for the hon. gentleman or his colleagues to obtain this information yesterday when the bill was before the standing committee. A standing committee is established precisely for the purpose of giving such information. I think hon. members of the opposition should avail themselves of the opportunity of attending the meetings of standing committees with a view to obtaining the information they require.

When I suggested that this bill be considered in the committee of the whole the hon. member for Laurier was the first to jump to his feet and suggest that this would be a crime, a terrible practice, and that the bill should be referred to the standing committee. We acceded to his wishes. The bill

[Mr. Chevrier.]

was referred to the committee, the experts appeared before the committee with all the necessary information, but the hon. gentleman was not present and his colleagues failed to ask these questions.

The hon. gentleman comes forward today and accuses us of refusing to give information. The hon. member's position lacks logic. My hon. friend knows very well we like nothing better than to provide pertinent information. The only thing we ask is that hon. gentlemen opposite request the information they require at the appropriate time and place. If they do so they will receive excellent service and co-operation from the government.

Mr. Chevrier: The position taken by the minister, Mr. Chairman, is untenable. The minister cannot come to the committee and take the position he has just taken. Whether or not this bill has been before a standing committee, and whether one or 25 witnesses have been called, the committee of the whole is entitled to have this information. It is not a valid reply on the part of the minister to say that the standing committee met and certain hon. members did not ask questions.

In one breath the minister admits that this information is public and can be obtained at the board of transport commissioners, but he refuses to give the information to the committee either because he does not have it or his officers will not give it to him. The point I now make is that whether or not this legislation has gone to a standing committee we are now considering it in committee of the whole, and it is the duty and responsibility of the minister, as a suppliant before the committee, to give it the information it requires.

Hon. members of the opposition are interested in knowing the amount of the freight rate and the method by which it was established. I asked for the production of the agreement. The minister said the C.N.R. advised him not to produce it and I will accept that, but I wish to know if the agreement was filed with the board of transport commissioners. Will the minister answer that question?

Mr. Balcer: I do not think so, Mr. Chairman, because this agreement does not have to be filed with the board. It is a private agreement between the railway and a private company.

Mr. Chevrier: If the agreement does not have to be filed with the board the minister should explain to the committee how the freight rate of X dollars on this commodity, moving from one point to another, moving on