

Branch Railway Lines

proposals that could be put forward to meet the needs of those places.

With regard to this resolution I think we should make our general viewpoints known about the whole question of dealing with these recommendations of the royal commission, but really we are talking in a vacuum until we have the terms of the bill before us. Therefore I hope the members of the official opposition will join with me in suggesting it might be wise to let the resolution stage pass tonight, with each of the other parties making their views known, in order to get the bill in our hands. Then if the minister on behalf of the government could assure us of having a suitable length of time to study the bill, which is very extensive and complicated—say about 10 days—we would be in a better position.

Mr. Pickersgill: If I might be permitted, Mr. Chairman, before the next member speaks, I would give that assurance without any hesitation. It would be much more desirable to have the bill studied reasonably thoroughly before embarking on debate on second reading, and in view of the timetable which the Prime Minister put before the house it would not appear likely to impede the program of the house in any way to give that assurance, because there is other legislation available for tomorrow and Wednesday, which I think will take all the time, and next week on Monday and Tuesday we have a weekly motion.

Mr. Fisher: Mr. Chairman, the minister is one person whose abilities I have a great deal of respect for, in his capacity to analyse, and also in his capacity to project his analysis into this chamber when he wants to. It is quite apparent from the introduction he gave this resolution that he has not chosen to do this and, knowing the minister, I assume that he has very good reasons for it, probably tactical.

But one might have assumed that on legislation which has been mooted so long, which, according to the minister, arose out of one of the great studies of transportation, the royal commission on transportation, we might have had an over-all presentation of the transportation policy of the government. It is now apparent we are not going to get it or, that if we get it, it will come piecemeal. It is not satisfactory to assume that we can get it at second reading, or that we are likely to get it then, and so we are left with the impression that the Liberal party's policy on transportation is a piecemeal approach, taking

a bit here and a bit there, without any over-all application or any over-all plan; because the minister, I think, would have to confess that this resolution cannot really stand as the main guts of the MacPherson recommendations.

There is nothing here about a national transportation board; there is nothing about a national transportation council. And so I am left to wonder what the minister and his predecessor have been doing with their time. The minister has told us the bill has been ready for a long time. He has had time to prepare a statement on national transportation policy, because anything that has to do with the railways, and particularly the major railways, which are certainly both vertical and horizontal in the transportation business, surely has implications and requires some kind of statement on national transportation policy.

We all know the minister is capable of giving us this, and the fact that he has not done so is an indication that members of the government feel it is best to leave it this way, so that they will not arouse too much antagonism or too much interest, and maybe this is the most effective way to get it through the house.

I could not help but be slightly amused by a comparison between the resolution put forward by the minister's predecessor, now the President of the Privy Council, and this one. There are a few changes. I can just see the blue pencil of the minister from Newfoundland cutting out the phrase in the previous resolution which read:

—to establish a branch line rationalization authority and a branch line rationalization fund to be continued for 15 years to assist in the establishment of an orderly, rational and planned program of abandonment of uneconomic branch lines—

That has been changed in the new resolution to this:

—to establish a branch line rationalization authority and a branch line rationalization fund to be continued for 15 years to assist in the establishment of an orderly program for the improvement of the efficiency of railway branch lines;—

This is a really subtle contribution the minister has made. We have cut out those okay words "rational" and "planned". I suppose this is to take care of the free enterprise activities in the area the minister represents. Instead of the kind of ugliness of "abandonment of uneconomic branch lines," we have this much more positive statement, "the improvement of the efficiency of railway branch lines". That is a really great contribution the