

Transportation

do not agree with me that parliament should know about that evidence, is precisely the kind of evidence that would affect the conclusion which hon. members might reach.

I personally have no use whatever for the proposition that when parliament or a parliamentary committee is interested in an important issue of public interest, and I say this in broad terms, there is any transaction on the part of a private or public company which should be kept from the members of parliament and the public when that information or transaction is necessary to a proper understanding of the purposes and to a proper appreciation of the public interest involved.

In any case, as other hon. members have experienced, it usually falls within the power of a parliamentary committee to say whether or not evidence which has been asked for should be given. I understand there was a motion before the committee which considered this bill that the Canadian Pacific should produce certain information. There was a vote on that motion and the majority voted that it should not be made to produce that information. If we carry that one step further, by putting this amendment into effect, what we would then have is a situation in which evidence was being produced to 25 members, or whatever the number might be, in camera and in secret, and if every member of that committee carried out the statutory injunction no one else would know about it. If evidence were given under those circumstances the members could not use it and their reports would not refer to it. Parliament would not know about that information and the press would not know about it or should not get a hold of it. That does not mean the press would not get it, but it should not. In heaven's name, what is the purpose of taking that kind of evidence, except to make everyone outside the charmed circle feel that something decisive and important was being kept from them? That is all it would accomplish. It would serve the purpose of arousing suspicions and wonderment instead of giving information and guidance, as should be the result of any evidence taken.

For those two reasons I find it very difficult to support the hon. member's amendment. On the first point I think it is appropriate for us as members of parliament to continue to demand the setting up, of committees where they are required, and to needle the government to that end. When the committee considers changing the rules it should give much more attention in the future to the question of

[Mr. Lewis.]

the powers of parliamentary committees, whether they are standing or special committee, particularly along the lines of the objectives intended by the hon. member for Peace River.

In any case, Mr. Chairman, I could not possibly support this amendment which proposes the taking of evidence in private and in secret and prohibits any members of the committee who hear the evidence from disclosing any part of that evidence outside the committee.

Mr. Bell (Saint John-Albert): Mr. Chairman, may I ask a question? Is the hon. member aware that the transportation committee sat in camera day after day in consideration of this bill.

Mr. Lewis: I was not aware of that fact. If the hon. member means that the committee held in camera sittings, taking evidence, that is one thing.

An hon. Member: Oh, no.

Mr. Lewis: It occurred to me that there may be a catch in that suggestion. All committees sit in camera to consider clauses of bills. I would hope that we do not ever take evidence in camera, because all evidence ought to be taken in public so that information and guidance can be given not only to members of parliament but to the public at large.

Mr. Baldwin: I do not attempt to change the hon. members mind. He has presented a very reasonable objection and I respect it, but I think I must point out on the point he raises that it was his last point which separates his approach and mine. Other hon. members of this party agree to an amendment under which a committee would have the power, in the same way the transport commission would have, to change its membership and number of members. I have no objection in that regard. I think the parliamentary committee, rather than the government, should have the right to alter and change its members as it sees fit.

My hon. friend, the learned member for Saint John-Albert, has put the case very well. There have been and always will be committees of this house which will be compelled to take evidence in camera and in secret. What bothers me is that we are being asked to give the transport commission the right to hear evidence in secret, a privilege which the government is not prepared to give to a committee of this house. Why should we have any less powers than the Canadian Transport