

Mr. Stevens: I believe it is the intention that we should turn to other business at 9.30. We have some comments to make on clause 69 and I see it is now 9.30.

Clause 69 stood.

The Chairman: Then pursuant to the order made earlier this day I request leave to rise and report progress.

Progress reported.

* * *

RAILWAY ACT

AMENDMENT TO GIVE AUTHORITY TO MINISTER TO ACQUIRE CERTAIN COST INFORMATION FROM COMPANIES

Hon. Jean Marchand (Minister of Transport) moved that Bill C-48, an act to amend the Railway Act, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications.

● (2130)

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to provide for the disclosure of railway cost information on a confidential basis from the federal government to the provincial governments. While this legislation was promised by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) at the Western Economic Opportunities Conference, it is not restricted only to the western provinces but applies to all provinces.

The railways had not in the past been required to disclose information on their cost of operation unless the Canadian Transport Commission held that this disclosure was in the public interest. This left the provinces without the necessary information for the formulation of all policies.

To date, considerable cost data has been made available to the federal-provincial Committee on western transport for its major studies. As well, where certain cost data have been requested by the provinces for policy formulation purposes, the federal government has arranged to provide this information through the Canadian Transport Commission. Western ministers have nevertheless pressed to have provisions for disclosure of cost information included in the Railway Act. The prime purpose of the legislation is to ensure that the federal government will be able to continue to fulfill its commitments in this regard to the provinces.

I should add that this proposed legislation is an interim measure pending the introduction of a transportation information act which will take in the whole transportation system and all modes.

Let us look now at the four new sections to be added to the Railway Act.

331.1 This section implements the undertaking of the Prime Minister given at WEOC for disclosure of information on railway costs to a province on a confidential basis. For this purpose the information on costs is defined as costs of "transportation services and operations" or "costs of a specified movement of a specified commodity", for example, a car load of cattle from Edmonton to Montreal.

Railway Act

331.2 This section provides that the minister for his own use can request information on costs of any kind from a railway company. This provision does not arise from the WEOC commitment.

331.3 This section provides that information on costs cannot be communicated to or published by any person, except that such information can be communicated to ministers of the Crown—federal or provincial—or public servants—federal or provincial—required by their duties to receive this information.

Subsection 3 provides that information on costs furnished to a provincial government or the minister under this act that is relevant to a proceeding under specified acts may be published or communicated by the province or the minister. This subsection implements the second principal undertaking on railway costs given at WEOC.

331.4 This section ensures compliance by a railway company with a request from the minister. If a railway company does not comply, the minister can use the powers available to him under section 82 of the National Transportation Act.

Section 82 of the act provides in part that the minister has the power to summon witnesses, enforce their attendance and compel them to give evidence and produce books, papers or things that are required to be produced, as is vested in any court in civil cases.

This, Mr. Speaker, is the gist of our proposed legislation.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, what we want to do actually by the proposed amendment to the Railway Act is to be able to get all information pertaining to freight rates and their justification when requested by the provinces or the Department of Transport. I think that is what not only the western provinces but the others as well have been requesting for a very long time.

We want to know. That would be done on a confidential basis for a very simple reason: I think that from the moment you accept competition between railway transport, shipping, trucking, and air transport there is a need to know exactly what the cost is to be able to compare and make sure that Canadians really get a fair deal with all those with whom they must deal.

So, Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the bill before us is very limited. There will be another later on, a general one, dealing with not only the whole cost but all forms of transportation. For the time being we want to know what it costs. The western provinces want to know what it costs to move commodities from one place to another and, presumably, the other provinces also want the same information. That is the purpose of Bill C-48 now before the House.

[English]

Mr. Jack Murta (Lisgar): Mr. Speaker, I certainly hope that I will not take up too much time of the House this evening because I understand that there are three more speakers. It would be tempting, after listening to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) speak, to get into all the areas of past inequities in eastern or western Canada pertaining to the whole aspect of freight rates, etc. I will not do that tonight because hopefully we will have