

good thing because the customers of CP had to pay for it. If it is not a good thing for CP, I fail to see why it should be a good thing for CN, even though it is a Crown corporation.

In any event, it seems clear that the principles involved in the amendments of the hon. member for Mississauga deserve support by all members of this House for the simple reason they are an indication that parliament is master of the activities of CNR and Air Canada. It would indicate the parliament of Canada does not approve of so much emphasis being placed on collateral activities such as hotels, towers and this type of thing, the cost of which should be scrutinized and deleted from the estimates for the calendar year 1973. Let these projects be financed, if they are necessary strictly from internal earnings. The fact that this direction is given by Parliament will be an indication to the officials of CNR that parliament is disturbed, and rightly so, about their activities in fields not directly related to transport. It should be a warning to Mr. MacMillan who indicated that intermodal methodology of handling business is a good thing. I do not know what he meant exactly by "intermodal methodology," but that is what he said in one of his answers in committee. As far as the Canadian parliament is concerned, intermodal methodology by C.N.R. should be confined to moving freight and moving people, not building towers and hotels.

Mr. Charles H. Thomas (Moncton): Mr. Speaker, I spoke in the debate when this bill was before the House for second reading on April 13. At that time I referred to the bill as an exercise in futility and an affront to this parliament. Nothing that has transpired since that time has altered my opinion of the bill. In fact, events since that date have served to buttress my opinion and reaffirm my conviction that this government, as it does from time with the CNR financing bill, is again playing games with this House.

This bill is a ridiculous exercise. I hesitated to speak on it again because I have spoken so often on similar bills over the past five years that I am beginning to wonder if there is any way of getting through to this government. I thought I would try once more to convince the government they should at least heed some of the advice of their own cabinet ministers who have said over and over again that this is a bad form of legislation, that there is no proper control over the financing of these two corporations and a new method of financing should be introduced. The hon. member for Central Nova (Mr. MacKay) read some statements by previous Ministers of Transport and the present Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) promising that legislation would be forthcoming to provide financing for these two Crown corporations in such a way that parliament would have some control over their spending, which in aggregate has been hundreds of millions of dollars every year.

This is a good time to look at the history of these financing bills. I say that because whether we agree wholeheartedly with the principle of the amendments, it is simply to bring before this House the fact that CN and Air Canada have grown beyond parliament. They have gone beyond the priorities that were set for them when they were formed many years ago. They have certainly gone beyond the priorities established for them in the National

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Transportation Act. It is time to examine what has happened since Bill C-164 was introduced to determine to what extent parliament is being bypassed by CNR and Air Canada.

● (1540)

Members on both sides have heard the comments made in the House by various ministers that new legislation would be brought down. They have attended meetings of the committee and heard witnesses dodge questions which were put to them, withhold complete answers, hide behind the cloak of confidentiality and in other ways avoid giving true answers to members of parliament. The presence on the order paper of amendments of the type we are considering is a good reflection of what went on in committee, and the way members on this side feel about the type of financing bill we are being asked to pass.

Bill C-164 was given first reading on March 19, and second reading on April 13 and 16. Twelve speakers took part in the debate at that time. Yet despite the government's assertions that this is an important piece of legislation the bill was set aside for six months and was not considered again until October 18 at which time there were five days of debate during which 46 speakers took part. Surely, we cannot accept the contention of the government that we have been delaying important legislation when 46 members feel obliged to say something about the operations of the two corporations concerned, as, of course, they are entitled to do.

Once the bill went to committee, it was handled very expeditiously in my opinion. The committee met on November 8, held 12 sittings and heard a number of witnesses. It reported back on December 20. I have described the bill as an exercise in futility but I would modify that opinion to this extent—it is an excellent vehicle for securing the attendance of officials of the CN and Air Canada before the committee. It gave us an opportunity to put questions to them which we had raised without success in the House. On each occasion the minister had sidetracked them in the usual way by saying he would take them up with the CN or Air Canada.

Perhaps the best witness I can call in support of my view that we are being asked to conduct an exercise in futility is the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) who also appeared before the committee. Someone asked him directly why the bill was necessary. He said, in effect, that if the bill were not passed the CN and Air Canada would have to borrow money on the commercial market and pay more for it. After all, the legislation before us is not necessary to enable those companies to borrow money. They already have that power under existing statutes. The minister added that the bill was necessary, too, because it gave parliament control over the appointment of auditors. One of my hon. friends has shown how little control parliament does, in fact, exercise over the appointment of auditors. The minister himself admitted that this appointment to the result of a cabinet decision taken without consultation and slipped into the bill for approval by parliament later. This is the way in which the government effectively bypasses the section of the act which says parliament must appoint the auditor each year.