

Canadian National Railways

Mr. Balcer: Mr. Chairman, it is very unfortunate that the hon. member for Laurier was not present yesterday at the meeting of the standing committee on railways, canals and telegraph lines, because it is precisely the purpose of that committee to put before its members all the technical information that is available within the company in all its details. I am sure nobody in the committee expects me to know all these various freight rates and so forth.

I quite agree with my hon. friend from Laurier that it is an important factor in a project such as this. Unfortunately I have not these rates at the present time, but I will be very pleased to obtain them from the officers of the railways or from the board of transport commissioners. If it had been possible for the hon. member to attend the standing committee meeting I am sure the two witnesses would have supplied this information to the hon. member, and from my point of view there would have been no objection whatsoever.

Mr. Chevrier: Is there any objection to giving the committee the actual freight rate?

Mr. Balcer: No, but I have not that information before me.

Mr. Chevrier: Can the minister get the rate from his officers, who I understand are now here? That being the case, I think the committee is entitled to this information. The next question is this. The minister did not give the committee a breakdown of how Canadian National Railways proceed to establish the freight rate in a situation such as this. I think we should know how they do proceed, because even though a member of parliament is not at the standing committee meeting, or is not a member of the committee, surely he is entitled, under the rule established by the minister that the government wants to give all the information it has at its disposal, to inquire what the terms are under which the freight rate is established.

In this case, if there is no objection from the railway, there should be even less difficulty in giving this information to the committee, and I wonder whether we can obtain it now.

Mr. Balcer: Mr. Chairman, I do not wish to repeat what I said earlier. As far as the question of how the C.N.R. has arrived at the rate, we must not forget that part of the agreement with the private company deals with certain penalties and certain minimum guarantees given by the company. These matters enter into the tabulation and making up of the freight rate that is arrived at. I cannot give this part of the agreement to

the committee except with the consent of the railway. However as far as the freight rate is concerned, I simply repeat that I will send this information to my hon. friend immediately this committee has finished.

Mr. Benidickson: Mr. Chairman, the minister has indicated that he does not wish to give certain details of the agreement, but would he see fit to tell us what period of time the agreement contemplates will be required, where there are obligations on the part of the company which in due time are expected to compensate for the capital costs as well as the transporting of the ore over that period?

Mr. Balcer: The arrangement contemplates that this minimum agreed guarantee and also the penalties in case of shortages are for a period of ten years.

Mr. Chevrier: Mr. Chairman, a moment ago the minister said the freight rate had to be filed with the board of transport commissioners. Does it in fact have to be filed with the board if it is a rate that has been established by agreement? I know that when the C.N.R. submits a tariff on which goods move, that has to be filed with the board. The question that now comes to my mind is this. Is this akin to an agreed charge? If it is not, it is a charge under an agreement. Has the agreement been submitted to the board? I assume that the agreement must of necessity be submitted to the board if it was made pursuant to the method outlined to the committee a moment ago by the minister.

The information I wish to obtain is this. How will the public know, if at all, about the nature of the freight rate that will be charged for this commodity?

Mr. Balcer: Mr. Chairman, I did not say that these freight rates had to be filed. What I said was that my information is that these freight rates have been filed.

Mr. Chevrier: If they have been filed, then why can we not find out what they are? The board of transport commissioners has them and they are public. Anybody can go over to the board and see them.

Mr. Balcer: Even the hon. member for Laurier could do so.

Mr. Chevrier: Yes, even I could do so; but why should I have to when we are dealing with this important matter in parliament at this very moment? Why should not parliament have this information?

Mr. Horner (Acadia): Why were you not present at the committee meeting yesterday?

Mr. Chevrier: My hon. friend should be quiet, Mr. Chairman, because he came to