

Canadian National Railways

for working capital. In this case the requirement is \$10 million. Would the minister indicate how frequently, historically speaking, Canadian National Railways has asked parliament to provide additional working capital, when this has occurred and the amount involved? Is this simply an item that goes into the debt structure? Otherwise, what rate of interest is paid on an advance of working capital of \$10 million?

In connection with the apparent requirement for working capital there is a reference to the Victoria bridge and the St. Lawrence seaway. As I recall, when the committee on railways and shipping, government owned, considered this matter there was some question whether or not this amount would be refunded to Canadian National Railways and when. The Minister of Finance of all people surely knows whether the St. Lawrence seaway authority is likely to refund this money or whether some other source is likely to refund it and how soon it will be refunded. If it is going to be refunded in the near future there is a possibility that perhaps this sum would not be necessary.

I go back to a request I made when we were at the resolution stage. I asked the Minister of Finance very specifically, because I thought it was his duty, to go to Canadian National Railways and inquire whether there was any possibility of amendment with respect to these immense sums. I indicated it was my understanding that the figures that are the basis of this bill were prepared by them many months ago. Many millions of dollars are involved and perhaps in some instances the directorate and management have decided that as of June 13 these funds will not be expanded in 1960. In accordance with my request of last week, did the minister make these inquiries and, if so, what has he heard from the management? Can he assure the house that every dollar of these immense requirements is likely to be spent in 1960 and therefore these clauses of the bill should be passed without amendment? If there is any possibility that these items are not required in full, why should parliament be asked to be simply a rubber stamp for capital proposals made by Canadian National Railways five or six months ago which are not valid today?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): Mr. Chairman, apparently the hon. member wishes me to present my credentials to the committee of the whole in relation to close supervision of the budgets of Canadian National Railways. All I can say to him is that I understand that the president and management of Canadian National Railways consider that the Minister

[Mr. Benidickson.]

of Finance has given their budget close scrutiny. Perhaps I need say no more than that on that score.

As to the various other matters that were touched upon by the hon. member, I think I might suggest to him, Mr. Chairman, that a lot of the information he seeks on the floor of this house is information which should have been obtained by him in the committee when the officials of the Canadian National Railways were there; that is the purpose of having such a committee. It is not for this committee to go into the details of the operating functions and financing of Canadian National Railways. I am happy to give to the committee any information that it is within my power to obtain, but I do think, Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Benidickson: On a question of privilege, Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton):—it is a waste of the time of this committee to ask for information that should have been requested in the railway committee.

Mr. Benidickson: On a question of privilege, Mr. Chairman: It is true I was a member of that committee. However, I want to say that the rules are very clear that the committee of the whole has jurisdiction above and beyond any committee of the house, and when we are dealing in sums like \$300 million it is quite proper to ask the Minister of Finance for Canada about his examination of the need for expenditures under some of these headings.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): Certainly it is quite proper to ask the Minister of Finance about his examination of these figures. We are not discussing that at the moment. What I was referring to was the attempt made here to ask for operating details pertaining to the functions of management of Canadian National Railways. I think the function of the committee, when it has the officials before it, is to obtain all information on that score. It is quite proper in this committee to ask the Minister of Finance for an accounting in relation to his functions and responsibilities, and I hope I shall be able to give that.

We were asked again, Mr. Chairman, about the \$10 million of working capital to finance the temporary alterations of Victoria bridge to co-ordinate with the St. Lawrence seaway. Again I was asked about the matter of the claim in relation to the seaway. We were over this in the committee last week. I could repeat what I said then on this subject, but I feel it would be completely unprofitable to do so. It would be straight repetition because I dealt with this subject fully at that time.