

Adjournment Debate

There was an agreement at that time that these requests would be considered in light of the impending federal human rights legislation which will deal, among other things, with discrimination in pension plans. There has been some comment that the provision of spouses' benefits is regarded by some as constituting discrimination in favour of married employees over single employees and, as a result, it will be necessary to review all aspects of survivor benefits once the human rights legislation is in place.

Once again I have to seek the hon. member's patience. These concerns will be very seriously dealt with, but they will probably not result in changes until a review is completed, which I hope will not be too long in taking place.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I shall be asking the question again.

TRANSPORT—POSSIBILITY OF CONTINUED ASSISTANCE TO FLOUR SHIPMENTS THROUGH ATLANTIC PORTS

Mr. Robert McCleave (Halifax-East Hants): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) went to Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, and there conferred with the three premiers of the maritime provinces regarding transportation matters. It was that meeting, a meeting of what I regard as the other type of parliament, which brings us together this evening. I asked a question of the Minister of Transport upon his return here—and I was backed by my colleague, the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall)—as to whether there was any discussion about the “at and east” subsidies, those subsidies provided by section 272 of the Railway Act with regard to the movement of flour and grain.

This is a very substantial issue, as it affects the ports of Halifax, Saint John, and some of those on the St. Lawrence River system. It is a substantial matter as it affects the flour industry in Ontario and Quebec. I told the Minister of Transport that if Bill C-31,—a piece of inequity which, thank God, has not yet been presented—is presented, it will meet a storm of protest.

I asked the minister if this had been discussed with the three premiers and, if so, with what result. He skated around that issue. I suspect that the Charlottetown conference did not consider whether Bill C-31 would be presented to the parliament of Canada.

It is all fine and dandy for the Minister of Transport or any other minister to meet with the premiers in my part of the world, for they enjoy a feast of publicity and the fact that there is no debate whatsoever until one can get one's hands at the throats of these people in either parliament or in the legislatures in which they speak. For a day or so they enjoyed the fact that they had apparently made some important decisions, and we who are the representatives of Atlantic Canada were discomfited by the fact that we had no quick means of finding out actually what their estimable honours really achieved at that Charlottetown conference. We still do not know with regard to Bill C-31. We do not know whether the

[Mr. Andras.]

premiers of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, who might have been thinking about the ports of Halifax and Saint John, put up any kind of fight at all on behalf of the “at and east” subsidies for the ports of Halifax and Saint John. I rather suspect that they did not. I do not know why they would not have, but nothing that I have read in the communiques from that conference suggests to me that the plight of the longshoremen, the freight handlers and the stevedors of Saint John and Halifax had very much to do with the conference which took place in Charlottetown, so I raise it here. I am sorry to be late with it, but I did operate under the rules of the House. I brought it before the minister as quickly as I could and I brought it up for debate in the House at this time as quickly as I could. In any event, Bill C-31 has not yet been presented to us for debate. When it is, the minister will know that there will be a very sharp debate on it indeed.

● (2210)

We have various subsidies in the field of transportation. Subsidies are provided by acts relating to movement of freight in Atlantic Canada. There are subsidies on the St. Lawrence Seaway, subsidies on the Welland Canal, subsidies on the grain movement on the prairies, subsidies involving the Crownsnest Pass rates, and undoubtedly there are other subsidies as well. So when the minister decided that something must be done about subsidies, he decided to tackle the poorest of the poor. This is what irks us in Atlantic Canada more than anything else. If he starts some bold, new march to some bold, new transportation horizons, why does he pick on the poorest part of Canada?

If the minister has the temerity to present Bill C-31 dealing specifically with the ports of Halifax, Saint John, and a few other ports before he tackles other larger subsidies in the Canadian transportation scene, he will find himself in a fight. We have done it twice now. First, the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski) and myself alternately on the late show brought up the issue last year, and then with respect to Bill C-87 regarding the restraint program we knocked it out. If now he dares to bring it back a third time in this parliament, he will know that we have had it and it is going to be fought. Also, the Minister of Transport will find that it will not only be the members for Halifax fighting for the ports of Saint John and Halifax and certain ports in Ontario as well as the milling industry. He will find other members on this side of the House who will fight that battle as well. I think he would be well advised not to consider proceeding with Bill C-31 in this session of parliament.

Mr. Marcel Roy (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants (Mr. McCleave) mentioned, it is an important issue. The minister has received various representations from different associations in this regard, and he has also received many representations from hon. members on this side of the House.

I welcome the opportunity to reiterate the government's position on continued assistance to flour shipments through Atlantic ports.