

freight and passenger transportation we shall compare favourably with neighbouring nations and all other foreign countries.

[English]

● (1610)

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre (Mr. Benjamin).

Mr. Baldwin: Just what was needed.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Give him a hand.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I hope the House will conclude, when I am through, that we have saved the best until the last. I should like to begin by saying to the minister that I find this, after seven years of waiting—particularly the last two years—to be the most incredible, the most unbelievable submission that I have heard or read about in my lifetime. I do not know whether to call it a swan-song or a hesitation waltz. It is one or the other; maybe it is both.

It has been two years since the western economic opportunities conference took place in Calgary; two years since the minister's admission that transportation policy was a mess; a year since those infamous election promises; nine months since the Speech from the Throne; eight months since the establishment of the departmental task force on transportation; and four months since the so-called breakthrough meeting in Calgary. During all that time there was a building up of expectations not only among members of parliament but among the public in general. After all those promises, after all that rhetoric, after all that delay in the unfolding of a new transportation policy, what do we get? We get a hodge-podge, a pot-pourri, or any other phrase you want to use. There is little or no evidence that the government is moving in a new direction. Any ideas the minister or others associated with him have expressed since 1967 about moving in a new direction in terms of transportation policy have been put on the back burner to simmer a while longer.

Mr. Speaker, as long as the present government is in office, Canadians will be starved of a transportation policy which is any different from the one we now have: they will be starved of a policy which really meets the transportation needs of this country. I do not want to be unfair in my criticism. Indeed, there are portions of the statement which, as far as they go, I welcome on behalf of my party. The government sees fit to pay lip service at least to some of the principles that the New Democratic Party has been advancing for many years, and the CCF before that.

● (1620)

I want to go back in history and quote a prophet from 1966. He is still with us. In 1966, speaking on second reading of the debate on the then new National Transportation Act, the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas), who was then leader of my party, said as follows as reported at page 8044 of *Hansard* for September 2, 1966:

Transportation Policy

The fact is that I do not believe that free enterprise and the competitive system of transportation can give Canada an adequate transportation policy at a price we can afford. . . . in a country of 20 million people where . . . we are more dependent than probably any country in the world on getting our goods to market over long distances at competitive prices, where we spend more per capita on transportation than probably any other country in the world, I do not think we can afford the luxury of having a free enterprise, competitive transportation policy . . . I believe that what we need is more government control and direction, not less, in the field of transportation.

The hon. member continued, and this is the prophetic part:

I am convinced that this government or the government that succeeds it will find that in a few years this transport commission—

That is the CTC, set up under the 1967 act.

—because of its lack of power and authority, will not be able to solve the problem. If the House does not at this time give that commission some power and put some teeth into the bill, then some subsequent parliament will be compelled to do so, after we have lost valuable years and very large sums of money.

The hon. member who represents Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands had that to say in 1967. I suggest the minister take the time to read his entire speech because those words are haunting him, his government and the whole country today. We have the government's recognition, however belated and reluctant, that in many parts of the country, in respect of many commodities, competition cannot be effective in setting rates. That belated and reluctant recognition we welcome, however limited it is.

We welcome the government's recognition, however belated and reluctant, that the government itself must have more direct control over transportation policy in Canada if we are to achieve an effective and integrated transportation network. We welcome the government's commitment to remove some of the historic freight rate grievances in western Canada and the Atlantic provinces, and hope to see implementation of some measures to bring this about. However, in light of what has occurred since July of last year in freight rate increases which have exaggerated and worsened the anomalies and inequities, I am not going to hold my breath waiting for the implementation of that recognition which the government shows.

We welcome the intention to place new emphasis on passenger rail service as an effective, rapid, low energy consuming means of inter-city transportation. But this is like a bride's trousseau—something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue. The proposal which made the headlines in this morning's papers regarding passenger service between Windsor and Quebec City is certainly not new, and let no one in the country be kidded into thinking it is. It is a proposal that has been dusted off from 1968, when it was originally proposed. In fact, Canadian National has been carrying out fast, comfortable, economic passenger train experiments for many years since then.

The minister and his departmental officials have overlooked that. They just dug out a proposal first made in 1968 regarding the Windsor to Quebec City corridor. But this is typically Liberal—and I spell that with a capital "L". It is failure to carry out principles that they themselves recognize to their logical, inescapable conclusion. Some of the principles are excellent and I personally have advocated them for a number of years. But they have been