

Transportation

I feel that we would get something out of it as well as all the people of Canada.

Too often in the last few years half-baked and poorly drafted bills have been submitted to us, and each time the government had to retreat, there was a weakening of its authority.

That is why I think that the minister should heed the advice given him not only by the members of this side of the house but also on the government side, because I am convinced that he was given the same advice in caucus by his fellow-members. He would be well advised to listen to those who sit here and improve as much as possible the legislation submitted and see to it that when these matters have been thoroughly studied, we pass quickly a measure which will give satisfaction to the Canadian people.

Those, Mr. Speaker, are the remarks which I wanted to make on that matter.

[*English*]

Mr. Ed. Schreyer (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, it would seem that the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pickersgill) simply cannot win. On the one hand he has been exhorted, in the past, to bring in a new, revised national transportation policy, and when he does so he runs into the opposition of hon. members opposite. Perhaps it is because the transportation policy incorporated in the bill now before us contains so many different facets of principles that hon. members may find themselves able to support many of those principles while being unable to support others.

• (7:40 p.m.)

After listening to the debate of the past few days it seems to me almost all hon. members agree that the intent of the bill as far as it relates to the desire to rationalize transportation in this country and bring about the integration or co-ordination of the various kinds of transportation services, is a good one. As to the expressed intention to bring the administration and regulation of transport under one so-called super board; it is difficult to be impressed by the proposals for administrative reorganization. It could be argued that the nation's transportation would be better co-ordinated if the various commissions now in existence were brought under one over-all commission. On the other hand, it could be argued that there is a point at which an administration body becomes too large and cumbersome, and at which it becomes desirable to reorganize it into subdivisions.

I do not attempt to say I have sufficient technical competence to pass judgment on this matter. But I do wish to say that the minister has caused a great deal of uneasiness and uncertainty in the minds of many of those who sit in this chamber, particularly those who come from regions in the country which are on the geographical periphery. The minister may not have meant it, but he gave the impression a few days ago that the effect of this bill would be to allow the railways to charge rates which were fully compensatory, the intention being ultimately to free rates from restriction and return to an ever greater degree of competition within our transportation system. I know that since this first impression was given the minister has taken the time to elaborate on some of these points and clarify certain areas of misinterpretation.

We understand, now, that certain classes of commodities will retain the benefit of freight subsidies from the national treasury for a number of years. There are some profound questions to be raised when discussing a national transportation policy and perhaps the first of these is whether a national transportation policy should be determined almost exclusively as a result of economic analysis and cost studies, or whether it should be determined after an analysis of the social factors involved in any change which might be made.

I have no doubt it could be shown that by allowing the railways freedom to set freight rates, abandon branch lines and so on, we would enable them to increase their revenues and, in consequence, reduce the need for subsidies. This would mean ignoring or forgetting the social consequences in certain regions and localities.

It seems to me we should not seriously be talking about basic changes in transportation policy without having regard also to tariff policy. I believe it is generally accepted as a proposition that tariff policies benefit the central part of the nation somewhat to the detriment of outlying regions. If it is part of national policy to maintain tariffs and other restrictions on imports, it follows that there should be acceptance of the need and of the justification for the continuance of transportation subsidies to the benefit of regions which are placed at a disadvantage because of those tariff policies. I have little doubt that this is the position taken by all members in this chamber who represent areas removed from the centre.