

Adjournment Debate

The people who live in these houses claim that older type homes such as log homes were far more substantial. I was pleased to hear the hon. member for Northwest Territories (Mr. Firth) mention this. When I mentioned it previously in the House, I was subject to some criticism. I do not think many members realize how comfortable a log house can be. May I call it ten o'clock, Mr. Speaker.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, is there someone on the government side who can tell us what we will be on tomorrow?

Mr. Lefebvre: As far as I know, Mr. Speaker, we will be back on the tax bill.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

TRANSPORT—USE OF TRANSPORTATION AS WEAPON TO ACHIEVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT—POSSIBLE EFFECT ON DREE PROGRAM

Mr. Elmer M. MacKay (Central Nova): Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday last I asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) whether the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) was in fact stating government policy when he made an announcement in Halifax to the effect that henceforth transportation will be a weapon to achieve economic development. I asked the right hon. member if that very commendable statement was government policy, and would he give us some of the details. I commend the right hon. gentleman for at least indicating that the minister's statement did have his approval.

This evening I wish to state some of the reasons why I am sorry the Prime Minister did not say that in fact it was government policy. So far the government has not shown that it uses transportation as any aid whatsoever to regional or economic development. The present nonsensical patchwork of rates and general policy actually keeps our region from capitalizing on a geographic advantage that it has. Even with the advent of container technology which gives the Atlantic region at least one plus factor, policies are weighted in favour of the central provinces.

● (2200)

I hope the spokesman for the government will at least give us an assurance this evening that the Minister of Transport was enunciating government policy and that the minister responsible for DREE is actively engaged with the present Minister of Transport, he being the former one, in a joint approach to using the transportation

[Mr. Smith (Churchill).]

factor as a component of DREE in connection with regional development.

Selective subsidies may not be the answer but more rational rate structures certainly are, and better co-ordination of existing carriers will help. The CN and CP, for example, could certainly do something to help transportation in this country. In the Atlantic region, where the EAR is almost an anachronism with the CNR surrounding it, the situation should be looked into. Improved technology would help, as would increased participation from other government agencies.

We in the maritimes want something more than vague promises and platitudes. We were given enough assurances during the last election campaign that there are great things in store in the field of transport. However, instead of imaginative management of transport we got mismanagement. At one time I would have suggested that the CDC might be utilized as a means of helping regional development by providing some expertise in transportation. But after noting its record since it was virtually presented with Polymer at bargain basement rates, and seeing it buy 9¼ million shares of Texas Gulf, losing nearly \$40 million on paper so far on the deal, I have concluded it would be best to leave the CDC out of it.

Since transportation is vital to the economy it is interesting to observe that the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Jamieson) has evolved a better approach. He recognizes the need for greater flexibility, for more decentralization, for increased interdepartmental and intergovernmental co-operation.

While DREE has still a long way to go it is only fair to say it is making progress under the present minister. I wish we could say the same for transport, but no one is able to do so particularly when the situation is getting worse and worse, and when the minister says it is even worse than we believe it to be. Apparently the railways will not supply cost data in such detail as to be useful to the government in assessing their operations. At long last legislation to deal with this point has been introduced—it was introduced some time ago in Bill C-48, if I remember correctly. But what a waste of time this entails. It is nothing less than a national disgrace.

I hope the Prime Minister will do what many members have requested him to do, that is, revamp and redefine the disposition of power in the department. It is all very well to decentralize the main components, such as pilotage authorities and the National Harbours Board so as to free them from undue political interference. That is a worthy object. It is quite another matter to place important components of the system in a position where they appear not to be subject to effective government control. Yet this is what is happening. This is what is preventing our coming to grips with transportation questions in this country.

Meanwhile the Chairman of the CTC and the Minister of Transport, each avoiding responsibility, pass the buck between them. For example, in Halifax a few days ago the Minister of Transport denied a request by the Atlantic provinces to refrain from lifting the freeze on freight rates. He said at that time: "I do not fix rates; the CTC fixes them. The final decision does not belong to me."