

Rate Structure on Freight on Maritimes

Another point I should like to make is this. During the period in which the minister was in charge of national defence the closing of bases in the Atlantic region threw hundreds of people out of jobs. In my own area 700 were thrown onto the streets by the closure of Point Edward naval base; not only have they been thrown out of employment but they face skyrocketing prices.

Since we have now lost the "skipper", the fellow from Bonavista-Twillingate, I thought we would now see a new look in the department. I understand from what I have read that the greatest ambition of the former minister of national defence was to become involved in transport, and that if he did he would make dramatic changes throughout the country and do great things for the future. I hope he will. Many fields of activity have been suggested and with the power he has in the cabinet I am sure that with one snap of his fingers he could bring about changes in these freight rates which would greatly benefit us in the Atlantic region.

With regard to Newfoundland, I have no doubt that the hon. member for St. John's has made strong representations on this subject but the cabinet never turns on its hearing aid no matter where the representations come from, whether from members of this party or members of their own. I have no doubt the hon. member has made representations on behalf of his own province; the fact that he was so close to the former minister of transport should have helped. That gentleman was a transplanted Newfoundlander; he was established there though he was not nominated by any convention. In any event, he has gone to greener pastures—and I mean, greener.

I do not wish to take up any more time. I am sure we shall have the opportunity on many occasions in the future to whisper into the ear of the present Minister of Transport (Mr. Hellyer) many of the things we should like him to do. Now that he has a new portfolio, let him not, for heaven's sake, make a mess of the Department of Transport as he did of the Department of National Defence.

Mr. J. P. Nowlan (Digby-Annapolis-Kings): I wish to add my voice to those of other members of the Atlantic area who have spoken during this grievance period on the subject of these freight rates which adversely and drastically affect the maritime economy.

Members more senior than I have spoken of their experience in taking part in grievance procedures. As a relatively new member I have wondered as to the effectiveness of

[Mr. Muir (Cape Breton North and Victoria).]

this procedure. On this occasion, though, I have been impressed as, I am sure, the new minister has been impressed, by the fact that all hon. members who have taken part have addressed themselves to one basic problem which adversely affects the whole eastern region of this country.

I appreciate some of the minister's difficulties. He has entered upon the duties attached to a new and challenging portfolio. Moreover, last year in a dynamic and somewhat controversial way he was involved in the passage of a bill which caused a great deal of controversy and anxiety throughout the country. As a result, he does not, perhaps, appreciate some of the nuances involved in a transportation bill which gives the railways the power to do what they have done in the Atlantic region.

This is the nub of the problem. This concerns more than a bunch of maritimers crying in the wilderness over what has happened. The minister has shown in the past he can take dramatic action if he considers it to be necessary. We hope he can do as much to alleviate the position in which we now find ourselves. During the last ten years we have in the maritimes been giving effect to "operation bootstrap". We have been trying to lift ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Now, in the first year of the second century we find ourselves faced with "operation blackjack". We pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and get hit over the head by the blackjack in the form of these new rates which setback the whole of the Atlantic area.

I shall not speak at any great length because I know the minister is dying to get up and give some answer to the points we have raised.

● (9:50 p.m.)

In addition, since this is a non-partisan debate, I would love to hear from members opposite about this problem which involves people from all corners. The hon. member for Halifax (Mr. McCleave) said that somebody was not in his corner. I do not care, in whose corner these people are. They are not in one political corner or another; they are backed into a corner by the use of these l.c.l. freight rates. These rates have no connotation to anything. In this case the Atlantic area has been hit over the head with a blackjack because these less than carload rates are of no use to the east. We do not have pool cars, association cars or piggy-backs; we do not have the great volume that the other parts of Canada have. We have to ship in less than