

National Transportation Act, 1986

Mr. Speaker, I am not the only one calling for those changes. They have been suggested by numerous groups and people, and I take this opportunity to underline the suggestions of the Prime Minister of New Brunswick who said on April the 1st in Moncton, and I quote:

The federal government's reluctance to date to incorporate into Bill C-18 satisfactory protection against the possible downside effects of the proposed legislation has increased the province's concern regarding the potential negative impacts of the new act on transportation services in New Brunswick, and in the Maritime Provinces in general. This is why New Brunswick is adamant that paragraph 3(1)(d) of Bill C-18, recognizing transportation as a key to regional economic development, be expanded to include the statement that regional economic development objectives will take precedence over commercial viability objectives when the two are in conflict.

And now for what was said at the same hearings by the Leader of the Opposition in New Brunswick, the next Prime Minister of the province, Mr. Frank MacKenna, whose position was much the same, and I quote:

We must have a provision in this Act by which regional development directives take precedence over commercial viability... I am not endorsing the word "balance", I am endorsing the word "precedence".

In fact, the word referred to in the text is "balanced".

Mr. Speaker, other groups and the Governments of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island also supported this amendment.

I would urge all Members of this House to read the motion carefully, because my purpose in moving this motion is to provide for a mechanism enabling the Minister to act in terms of regional development. The Minister would either act alone or in consultation with the provinces or another agency.

Often, when we talk about regional development, it turns out no one actually has the responsibility. Mr. Speaker, Moncton, as you know, has suffered a massive loss of jobs. Every time we mentioned the subject in questions to the Minister of Transport, he told us the matter was being considered but that he did not intend to intervene in the business of Canadian National.

My motion would have given the Minister the means to act and to save the jobs we are losing today. By the end of this year, the number of employees will have dwindled to about 350, while in September, 1984, nearly 1,200 people were employed at the CN shops. So you see, losing all those jobs is quite a blow for New Brunswick. The legislation should have provided for a mechanism enabling the Minister to take action, either alone or together with the Province of New Brunswick; the Province of New Brunswick did get involved but it did not have the means, there was no mechanism for it to act together with the federal Government to save these jobs—

Mr. Speaker, I urge Hon. Members to examine this motion, to study it and to think about regional development, and of course I ask them to support the motion.

• (1210)

[English]

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Mr. Speaker, the two main issues that came before the committee when it was holding hearings on the Government's White Paper *Freedom to Move* and hearings on the legislation, were the matters of regional economic development and safety security. These were of particular interest in Atlantic Canada.

I want to congratulate the Hon. Member for Westmorland—Kent (Mr. Robichaud) for this amendment because it deals with concerns that were felt by committee members from all Parties.

The amendment substantially deals with the concerns expressed about those issues by many individuals and organizations in Atlantic Canada as well as western Canada.

If the committee had not been placed under such a restrictive time limit, and had been able to travel to such places as Yellowknife, Whitehorse, northern Ontario, southwestern Ontario, northern Quebec and places in northern British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, I suggest we would have heard the same concerns as were expressed in Halifax, Moncton and St. John's.

Transportation is essentially a public utility, whether it is privately or publicly owned. All of the economic and social activities of a region such as Atlantic Canada depend on the transportation system that is designed to assist regional economic development. If the principle of the bottom line, which is cutting costs, takes priority, then of course lay-offs, rail line abandonment, and plant closures will result.

Surely the transportation system does not exist in those parts of Canada just to make a buck. When a transportation company, whether it is an airline, railway or trucking company, is told that it must operate as a public service, it is up to the Crown to cover the difference between revenues and costs in order to maintain a transportation service that will assist in further regional and economic development. Once that is accomplished the transportation mode becomes all the more viable. That is so because the region is developing, enlarging its economic activity and providing employment. Therefore, it provides more traffic for that mode of transportation.

• (1220)

The Government itself, as well as government Members on the committee, recognize that regional and economic development must play an essential role in any national transportation legislation. This is certainly set out in the report of the committee on the White Paper. It should take precedence over economic viability of the transportation system.

We cannot have it both ways. We submit that the development of the economy and the development of a region have to take priority over whether or not a railway, an airline or a trucking company can make a good buck. When they are left to operate with total so-called freedom to exit or enter a route