

*Transportation*

implicit attempt which is embraced by the legislation to give the railways of this country more freedom to compete for business without being inhibited by unnecessary regulation and control from the top. I agree with the emphasis that the proposed legislation places—as did the minister in his pronouncements in various parts of the country—upon a quest for a national transportation policy, upon the need for integrated planning among the various facets and arteries of our national transportation body, upon the importance of research in the transportation field, and upon the encouragement that is offered regional air carriers.

However, Mr. Chairman, I do have a fundamental objection to hurrying this proposed transportation legislation through the standing committee and through this house. As has been pointed out in this committee, there has been a surfeit of briefs and representations made to the standing committee on transportation and communications in regard to this legislation. My colleague from Acadia pointed out yesterday that some 3,000 pages of evidence were compiled and submitted to the standing committee. It has been, to say the least, difficult to assimilate and absorb the highly technical and in some instances highly expert body of information contained therein. The subject speaks for itself, when one deals with a piece of legislation as revolutionary as this, as revolutionary as the minister has stated it to be on occasion.

● (4:10 p.m.)

When one is exposed to some 3,000 pages of evidence and technical information in a limited period of time, it must be obvious to members of the committee that it is extremely difficult to absorb and understand the nuances and finer points of the subject. As a member of that standing committee and as a member of the committee of the house dealing with the legislation, I plead for more time to acquaint myself with the highly complicated subject at hand.

Having said that one of my objections at this stage is the hurry attached to the processing of the legislation in the house, I would emphasize that my main fear in connection with this legislation is for the shippers and consumers of western Canada. I ask the minister to what extent he feels it is safe, economical, practical or realistic to give the railways virtually complete freedom to compete for every freight dollar they can get. I submit that is the effect of the proposed legislation. It takes the shackles off the railways in this country. Here, I might say that many of

[Mr. Sherman.]

us in the committee hearings have asked for an explanation of these shackles. We have never been satisfied what these shackles were in the minds of railway executives. But when these so-called shackles are later removed under the terms of this proposed legislation from the railway companies in this country, the companies will have free rein to charge what the traffic will bear, to fight for their own survival in a free, competitive environment, and presumably in a free and competitive national economic market.

As a member of the Conservative party, philosophically I am a believer in and supporter of the free enterprise system. I believe wherever possible free enterprise should be encouraged, stimulated and protected in this country. But I question whether, at this stage of our national development, in the particular economic crisis in which this country is involved at this time, in the particular stage of evolution of the railroads and development of their role in the building of Canada, it is advisable or in keeping with the best principles of the free enterprise system, to give those railroads carte blanche to compete for profits in the market place.

Bill C-231, like the abortive Bill C-120 preceding it, grew out of the recommendations of the MacPherson Royal Commission on Transportation. The MacPherson Royal Commission laid the groundwork, and did the basic research into problems connected with transportation in this country, that spawned Bill C-120 and subsequently Bill C-231. Circumstances in the railroad business and circumstances in every facet and every level of society have changed sharply since the MacPherson Royal Commission carried out these investigations. When the MacPherson Royal Commission looked into transportation problems, and railroad problems in particular, in this country the railroad industry was in serious trouble. I submit that this is hardly the case now. I do not think anybody in this committee can argue that the railroad industry is in serious financial trouble today. Its potential for profit, progress and success is unlimited. Witness the bumper wheat crops which have been Canada's good fortune in the past five to seven years; witness the huge wheat contracts signed with other countries round the world; witness, for example, the rise in the potash industry of Saskatchewan, a dream undreamed seven years ago when the MacPherson Commission began its investigation.