

York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens) have this tweedle-dee and tweedle-dum act going on between them. But then their leader revealed all to us when he said that Tories think that big deficits are bad, but in the immediate period we will have a bigger deficit because the way to have a smaller deficit is by having a bigger one. His words were still echoing in the television chamber when the hon. member for York-Simcoe found that to be too much for his Toronto friends. He said that surely the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) only meant this would last one month, two months or three months, that it would be a short-term deficit which would then disappear.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the minister but the time allotted to him has expired. He may continue with unanimous consent. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank and congratulate my good friend, the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski), for presenting his motion today on behalf of his party and giving the House a chance to discuss transportation. The hon. member for Vegreville and I have done this on numerous occasions in the almost ten years that he and I have been here, and we still have to put up pretty well the same arguments to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) that we did ten years ago.

• (1620)

I think we can support the motion, but later on toward the end of my speech I intend to move an amendment in the following words:

(7) to implement the Hall royal commission report recommendations with regard to statutory rates;

(8) to ensure that transportation be used as an instrument of national policy rather than an instrument to make profits.

In 1974 the Liberals made glowing promises to improve the transportation system, and judging from the election results the program they promised received support from a majority of Canadians. Since then the commitments have been abandoned. There is a list of broken promises as long as your arm. The hon. member for Vegreville listed some and I will list more later.

Before I speak to what is in the motion I should like to speak to what is not in it. For a century Canadian transportation policy has been plagued by the myth that competition, profits and free enterprise would solve our problems in transportation. When are we going to stop being made fools of by this giant con job? We have a small population scattered over a great deal of geography, with extremes of climate and markets that are fragmented. It seems to me that that calls for co-operation and sharing of the cost of transportation by the nation as a whole.

Transportation companies have been taking large profits out of the consumer's and taxpayer's pockets, and now that the government has made the CN more commercial and business-like the CN has increased its profits from \$28 million to \$136

million. That figures out to about a 383 per cent increase in one year.

CP Limited increased its profits 31 per cent, from \$247 million to \$325 million. Air Canada's profits are up 135 per cent. CP Air increased its profits by 506 per cent, but it still provides inadequate service. It still does not provide enough rolling stock or adequate facilities of a reasonable standard.

These companies have been siphoning off profits and putting them into the pockets of shareholders instead of reinvesting a larger portion in rebuilding, enlarging and improving our rail and air systems. The taxpayers are headed for more stormy weather, and the Canadian traveller will be facing higher fares if either the Liberals or the Conservatives succeed in turning our transportation system over to the tender mercies of private enterprise.

The Minister of Transport wants to privatize Air Canada and the CNR. So does the Conservative financial critic, the hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens). In May 1977 he said:

I suggest it is time to stop counting and start subtracting. It is time to begin divesting ourselves of some of these Crown corporations rather than creating new ones.

In that context he was referring to Air Canada. It was the people of Canada through their government who built a national airline when private enterprise would not touch it with a ten-foot pole because it could not make a fast buck. Now that there is some profit, private enterprise wants the gravy. Where was private enterprise when we needed it?

On March 3 of last year the hon. member for York-Simcoe said:

If this government was serious in trying to orient the CN to a more businesslike approach, why will they not let the private sector buy into the CN?

As if we have not had enough grief with CP, that hon. member now wants to let the same breed of cats into the CN. Just so there is no confusion about Tory transportation policy, I remind the House that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) wants to give the CPR more airline business. When will the official opposition learn that you cannot depend on the CNR to provide fair, equitable service at a price that consumers can afford?

While the Leader of the Opposition was busy attacking Petro-Can, the only major oil company in Canada that is not foreign owned, he was walking across this country defending the CPR. Imagine defending an outfit that owes the people of Canada \$500 million in deferred taxes, has received hundreds of millions of dollars in government handouts, that sabotages grain movement and then will not even tell us how much the chairman is paid. We had to find that out from a U.S. authority.

It was the official opposition that persuaded the government to amend Air Canada legislation to require Air Canada to operate in contemplation of profit. That can only mean one thing—reduced service to Atlantic Canada, the prairies and outlying regions where there is not the volume of traffic to sustain profits.