

Speaker, Canadians are not in favour of patriating the Constitution under the terms unilaterally set by the federal government.

The government has been saying all along that it is acting in response to urgent public demand. This is no longer the case; the opposite is true.

Canadians realize that there are other pressing problems of a higher priority that they are anxious to have resolved before patriation of the Constitution is even considered.

I say with respect, Mr. Speaker, that it is unfortunate that our Prime Minister wants a patriated Constitution as his monument before he steps down. It has been said that he will do anything to go down in history as a father of his country and, as others have said, will even put his country "through the boredom, conflict and agony of this incredible constitutional season."

I believe today, Mr. Speaker, that the national priorities for positive action that should be taken by governments and all of us in this House are to try to solve such issues as high unemployment, two-digit inflation and downward economy. Above anything else, Mr. Speaker, I do not believe we have a constitutional crisis in our country, as some would wish us to think.

There is no question that we do have a crisis, Mr. Speaker, but what it is is an economic and unemployment crisis that has been literally swept under the carpet, out of sight and out of mind, in the hope that somehow it will all go away. It would be wonderful, Mr. Speaker, if things were as easy as all that.

We all know that this wishful thinking has resulted in little or no concrete action being taken on these national concerns which are causing, Mr. Speaker, not only a national crisis, but family crises, family breakups, inflationary prices and a continuing lower standard of living for all Canadians.

These are the real crises, Mr. Speaker. These are the crises with which we should be dealing and to which we should be giving our undivided attention in an effort to solve them. We should not be sidetracked by fake constitutional crises that will not put one slice of bread on the table, that will not build one affordable house for Canadian families lacking in suitable accommodation, and that will not put clothes on the backs of Canadians.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mitges: May I call it ten o'clock, Mr. Speaker?

● (2200)

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[English]

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

Adjournment Debate

MARINE TRANSPORT—WITHDRAWAL OF DART CONTAINERLINE SERVICE FROM HALIFAX—ROLE OF PRESIDENT OF CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS

Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Dartmouth-Halifax East): Mr. Speaker, I am here this evening to pursue a little further the disastrous result of non-intervention by the present federal government with respect to the move of Dart Containerline from the port of Halifax to the port of Montreal. My colleague, the hon. member for Halifax West (Mr. Crosby), and I have raised this matter in the House on a number of occasions over the last ten days since the announcement of the move was sprung upon us. They are concerns which flow from factual data about this very serious move on the part of Dart for, after all, Dart accounts for approximately 30 per cent of the traffic volume through the port of Halifax going up river to Montreal. Earlier today, the Premier of Nova Scotia, Mr. Buchanan, and his minister of development, Mr. Thornhill, met with the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin). The reports from that meeting are somewhat optimistic from the point of view that the minister has now indicated he is prepared to examine the impact of subsidies on river ports and the inequity which might arise from that respecting the ports of Halifax and Saint John. That, at least, is a step in the right direction.

What is required, what I am asking of the government, is for a full-scale inquiry in two parts. One part should be undertaken within the ambit of the Canadian Transport Commission having to do with rates, rate charges, the growth in rate charges and the justification for rate increases in recent years by Canadian National. The second part should be undertaken by the government itself because it is a matter of policy and has to do with the full investigation and revelation of the dollars and cents being spent in the principal ports on the St. Lawrence River versus the dollars and cents being spent in the development of the two principal east coast ports.

The purpose of that inquiry will be to determine whether inequity is built in by reason of government policy in these areas. Having said that, and recognizing the difficulty of the minister with direct intervention in precluding the right of private enterprise to decide where it will operate from and under what circumstances, it seems to me there is still, notwithstanding the optimistic notes from this afternoon's meeting, every reason to believe this move and its disastrous effect on the port of Halifax-Dartmouth can be, if not completely avoided, at least alleviated. I am hopeful that is the case. I am hopeful that a positive tone from the Minister of Transport will have that result. Failure to have that result will be worse than the impact on the port of Halifax, not on the opening of the seaway alone, but of taking advantage of the opening of the seaway by government to effect year-round transportation into the port of Montreal, which took away the very active winter season for the ports of Saint John and Halifax. If we fail in this, some horse trading can be done. In this connection I shall list some things for the benefit of the parliamentary secretary, who is kind enough to be here this evening, and expand on this very serious question.