

Government Orders

place will create opportunity for Canadians. Unfortunately, this government cannot or will not believe that independent Canadians know what is best for a continuation of prosperity.

• (1320)

The members opposite continue to believe that private property owned by free citizens must have government interference to be viable. With that in mind, why is this Liberal government restricting ownership by any one sector to 15 per cent of outstanding shares? What if western grain producers and operators can afford to and wish to purchase as much of CN as they can to maintain a say in what prices will be charged to move their grain to market? What if western interests want to make certain CN will charge the price that is necessary to move the grain and make a profit but prevent outside interests from arbitrarily setting extremely high rates to ship their grain? What if these Canadian interests wish to purchase more than 15 per cent? Why can they not?

Why does this Liberal government continue to talk free enterprise but always intervene in the free market? Why does the government always put up barriers to the free movement of goods, services, and enterprise? Can it not understand that its outdated measures are holding back the future growth and the competitiveness that are required to make Canada an effective force in the world market?

Several ideas have been forthcoming that would allow hard-pressed taxpayers to recover some of their investment in CN. One idea is rationalizing the CN operation for public sale based solely on offering rolling stock, trucking, and real estate for public tender and having government retain ownership of the iron highway. Taxpayers have purchased the asphalt highways in this land. Why not allow taxpayers to keep the iron highways they have purchased?

Just as government levies a fee to use the open road, a realistic fee could be charged to all users of the iron highway. This measure will allow taxpayers to receive some return on the investment that opened this land from sea to sea. This measure has been tried and found to be viable in Great Britain. Granted, some may shout that government has no place in the iron highway, and some may point out that there are wrongs to this plan, but why does this government not allow discussion on this point? This government is quick to shout that it has consulted on many items in the agenda. Why is this government afraid to consult on this measure in the House?

Do not misunderstand my criticism, Mr. Speaker. I am a firm supporter of privatization, a firm believer that private industry can operate an enterprise far more effectively and efficiently than any government. I am a firm believer that private industry can create jobs and economic wealth far better than any government. However, there are several issues in this legislation that

do not offer the best value for the dollar to Canada's hard-pressed taxpayers. Make no mistake, it was tax dollars that created the CN this government now wants to pass to private ownership. I have no problem with that decision. I only have a problem with the manner in which this initiative takes place.

Taxpayers deserve maximum return for their investment. Taxpayers deserve liquidation of CN real estate assets to pay down the CN debt, which may make this sale unattractive to some purchasers. Taxpayers do not deserve to have their hard-earned dollars used to rid this company of one cent of debt while any asset remains.

Taxpayers do not deserve to have a hidden agenda set by this Liberal government, such as head office location or official languages requirement, which other private enterprises can forgo, to hinder the sale to and the profitability of future owners.

I believe I have raised several issues that require answers. I believe I have pointed out to taxpayers why this government is not giving them the best value for their dollar. It is now up to the government to answer those concerns, and I challenge them to do so.

• (1325)

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Deshaies (Abitibi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity today to speak on second reading of Bill C-89, whose purpose is to privatize Canadian National, a decision that was announced in the last budget and is well on its way to being implemented.

However, before this bill does what it is supposed to do, which is to privatize CN, there are a few points I would like to raise for the benefit of the Minister of Transport and his colleagues, and I am referring to the importance of the railways for resource-rich regions like the Abitibi in Quebec, the riding I represent in this House. My concern is that this bill should benefit, not penalize the railways.

The railway system was one of the keys to the economic development of the Abitibi and, as we all know, was also instrumental in the development of many other resource regions in Quebec and Canada. I often wonder, when I see these small rural municipalities along the railroad tracks, whether they grew up around the railway station or attracted CN to the area so they could expand.

We have to ask whether this government, like previous governments, will again be wide of the mark with its railway development policy and this new policy of privatization.

Could it be that once again, Quebec has been the first to realize the importance of having a modern railway adapted to the needs of today's economy?

We all know that the decline of our Canadian railways is not a measure of their usefulness, since during the recent debate on