

Maritime Transport

● (1532)

[Translation]

Mr. Pinard: Mr. Speaker, after consultation with opposition parties, I would like to draw the attention of the House to the fact that it is four o'clock and that we should proceed with consideration of notice of motion No. 23, in the name of the hon. member for York-Sunbury (Mr. Howie). I ask for the unanimous consent of the House so that all notices of motion prior to No. 23 be allowed to stand and that the hour provided for consideration of private members' business expire at 4.35, when we can call it five o'clock.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): The House has heard the request of the parliamentary secretary that the Chair should consider it four o'clock and that all notices of motion prior to No. 23 be allowed to stand by unanimous consent? Is this agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

[English]

TRANSPORTATION

SUGGESTED NETWORK FOR MARITIME PROVINCES

Mr. J. Robert Howie (York-Sunbury) moved:

That the Standing Committee on Regional Development be empowered to study the concept of using transportation as a development tool by putting in place a modern transportation network in the maritime provinces, incorporating bus, train, highway and air services, and report back to the House its findings on the desirability and the best ways and means of achieving such a concept.

He said: Mr. Speaker, we must focus the attention of all departments of government on the issue of regional transportation if we are to succeed in helping Canadians who live in the Atlantic provinces to help themselves. Transportation is of paramount importance to the region, and since it is related directly to the whole question of regional economic expansion I want it placed before the appropriate committee of this House to be considered and dealt with within the total context of that committee's mandate.

Lack of an effective transportation system has been a problem in the maritime provinces ever since the turn of the century when the intercolonial railway was absorbed by Canadian National Railways. A gradual increase to bring fares charged in the maritimes to the higher level charged in Upper Canada was brought about by 1923. One of the early rate hikes amounted to about 120 per cent. The competitive disadvantage to the maritimes was recognized in 1927 with the passage of the Maritime Freight Rates Act under which rail freight rates were reduced by 20 per cent for freight passage within the maritimes, and a slight reduction was made with

[The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier).]

respect to freight originating in the maritimes for transportation elsewhere in Canada. In 1957 the subsidy was increased to 30 per cent and in 1969 the Atlantic Regional Freight Assistance Act was passed providing subsidies to Maritime truckers.

In 1974 changes were made in the federal freight subsidy program affecting railways and truckers in the maritimes; an additional selective subsidy of 20 per cent in addition to the existing 30 per cent subsidy came into effect. This program was designed to assist the transport of selected commodities grown or manufactured in the Atlantic provinces and shipped to other parts of Canada for sale.

Despite millions of dollars paid in these subsidies, maritime shippers still find themselves at a comparative disadvantage in selling products from the maritimes in the central Canadian market. There are serious structural deficiencies in our transportation system which work against Canadians who live in the Atlantic provinces. Because of tariff and quota regulations, Canadians who live along the Atlantic seaboard form a captive market for industries in central Canada. On the other hand, their distance from the more densely populated markets places them at a serious disadvantage when it comes to developing an industrial base of their own. With smaller industries and a lower population they ship a lower volume of products through older and less developed transportation carriers at transportation costs which are much higher both on a unit basis and in terms of the distance travelled. Maritimers are paying for unused capacity as well as for part of the subsidies which they themselves receive.

As a result of the population and industrial imbalance between the maritimes and central Canada, many boxcars go to the maritimes loaded with goods for delivery there and return empty or partially empty. The relatively low volume shipped westward means that maritimers do not enjoy all the advantages of competition between carriers. The trucking operation which developed dramatically in recent years has still not reached its potential. Moreover, the high risk factor involved and the smaller profits to be made by truckers meant that the operation was much slower to start than might have been expected.

In addition to suffering from a lack of competition between carriers, maritimers also suffer from the lack of co-operation between road and rail and from a failure to bring about integration in certain areas. Railroads and truckers should, for example, be encouraged to become involved in common warehouses and integrated schedules to their mutual advantage and that of the public they serve.

● (1542)

I would like now to turn briefly to the quality of transportation service in the maritimes and the Atlantic region. One of the most criticized features of air travel is the number of intermediate stops that must be made between centres. Let me illustrate this. If you are travelling at around 6 p.m. from Charlottetown to Fredericton, you fly from Charlottetown to Halifax, you change planes, and then you fly from Halifax to Moncton, from Moncton to Saint John and from Saint John to