

Atlantic Regional Freight Assistance Act

finesse on the part of the new Minister of Transport. If the Minister of Agriculture had done this to members of the agriculture committee we would have raised Cain with him. I think it was rather offensive to the Transport Committee to do this.

I was a member of the agriculture committee which recently toured eastern Canada, including the maritimes. On that tour we heard from individual farmers and farmers' groups complaints about the high freight rates in the maritimes. We were told of areas in which there is no competition in transportation and where the railway charges as much as the traffic will bear. Where there is competition, freight rates are quite a bit lower than they are in areas with no competition.

I wonder how this subsidy program will apply to the poor chap who lives in the country or in a small town and has to pay a higher freight rate than to the person who lives on a main, commercial route. The minister should look into the application of the subsidy in such cases. I do not think it is fair that just because one lives off a main route we should pay one and a half times what others pay for the same service.

I agree that the transportation situation in the maritimes is difficult because freight is sometimes moved by boat, sometimes is transshipped, etc. It is extremely difficult for a farmer to import fertilizer or sell his produce on the competitive market when he is faced with this type of situation. Having made that tour of the maritimes I understand why the people of the area will be unhappy if any of the guarantees they now have are taken away from them. Their experience since confederation has not always been the best. They are a captive market in respect of some commodities and receive no privileges to compensate for this.

I hope the minister intends to remove some of the existing inequities. I know the people of the region would be unhappy if any of the guarantees they now have were removed. They will be unhappy if any of the subsidies they now received are removed in the future. I believe that freight assistance and an adequate freight rates policy are the basis for good economic growth and development in the maritimes. If such a policy is evolved and consistently applied, I am sure the maritimes will benefit. I can understand the position of these people because of their past experience. I, too, Mr. Chairman, will be making a few comments when we deal with the other clauses of the bill.

[Mr. Thomson.]

The Deputy Chairman: Shall clause 2 carry?

Mr. Jamieson: Mr. Chairman, I am at the disposal of the committee in this regard, but since the general discussion was on clause 2 I wonder whether at this point hon. members would like me to reply to some of the matters they have raised. It is entirely up to the committee.

Mr. McGrath: That would be very useful, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Jamieson: I have listened with a good deal of interest and understanding—

Mr. Nowlan: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, I do not wish to interrupt the minister but I should like to ask a question. If the minister replies to questions now, will it prevent his replying to questions asked as we deal with other clauses? I hope that is not the case.

Mr. Jamieson: I would assume not, Mr. Chairman, in view of our earlier decision that the general discussion would be on clause 2 rather than clause 1. But perhaps the Chair would be willing to rule on that matter. I think this is agreeable. I have no wish to cut members off from further discussion.

Mr. Nowlan: We do not want the minister to exercise the right of reply on clause 2 only, because we shall be asking specific questions when dealing with other clauses. I hope he gets the exercise of standing and replying to those questions.

The Deputy Chairman: The Chair can rule in advance that the discussion will have to be relevant to each clause.

Mr. Jamieson: I have listened with a good deal of interest and, I think hon. members would be willing to concede, understanding to the matters raised by hon. members. I say at the outset that I agree completely with the concept outlined by the hon. member for Annapolis Valley that aid to transportation and a rational transportation program are vital to the further development of the Atlantic provinces. It seems to me it is as important that we have this particular aspect of regional development involved in our thinking as it is that we deal with other matters which are important to national unity, such as the official languages bill which we will be dealing with later today. This measure has the same kind of significance to national unity and national development as other measures