

*Atlantic Regional Freight Assistance Act*

that taking action on the lines I have indicated under clause 5 would be analogous to amending the Crownsnest Pass agreement; it would be like using the power given by order in council to vary or remove those rates which are of such importance to the west. It would be like giving the cabinet power to vary by order in council term 31 or term 32, if it wished to do so.

● (10:40 a.m.)

Frankly, I cannot agree to such wide power being given to a cabinet, no matter how laudable the purpose, without restriction or some time limitation. I find it even more difficult to accept the necessity for this power, in view of the statement of the minister himself who said that this bill is an interim measure.

I suggest, reading clauses 5 and 6 together, that unless there is proclamation beforehand, these provisions cannot effect the purpose outlined by the minister the other day, namely to grant selective assistance to a certain amount during the next nine months. Surely the government will have a comprehensive Atlantic transportation policy by the fall, and this is certainly within nine months.

The minister is aware of the ironic situation that the Transportation Committee faced. I am a member of that committee and the report on the trip to the Atlantic region which took place last February was given the finishing touches on the Friday that the bill was given first reading in the house. Although the bill and the committee report dealt, in part, with the same subject matter, there was not of necessity any relationship between the two. In fact, the bill was given first reading, second reading and then sent to committee of the whole before the report of the transportation committee was tabled the following Tuesday.

I do not want to become partisan or to digress at this point. We are debating a bill dealing with Atlantic transportation that is supposedly an interim measure, and as I say the bill was introduced before the committee report really came before the house. I appreciate the minister says that this interim measure had to be brought forward, and we ourselves wanted some action taken. But let me return to clause 5. I really cannot understand why the minister or his cabinet needs to strike, in effect, at the very core of the Maritime Freight Rates Act and vary or remove tariffs for preferred movements of traffic as mentioned in the bill. As I said earlier, this

[Mr. Nowlan.]

provision regarding rates was one of the conditions on which Newfoundland entered confederation, and any such variation would be analogous, in my view, to giving the government power to vary, for example, freight rates through the Crownsnest Pass or to varying term 31 or 32 by order in council. It really strikes at or castrates the very principle of the Maritime Freight Rates Act.

I suggest, Mr. Chairman, reading these two clauses together, that they will not meet the purpose for which they are designed, because unless there is proclamation of the lifting of the freeze on rates they will not be able to take effect. If proclamation is given and the rates freeze is removed, then why does the government need the power to vary or remove the tariffs? Let the government bring in its new comprehensive Atlantic transportation bill. This is the major feature of this bill that I find difficult to accept.

Firstly, I say the bill does not go far enough in regard to the removal of discrimination between the railways and truckers. However it does recognize the principle of assistance to truckers, and I hope that this principle will be extended in the comprehensive policy of the government so that discrimination will no longer exist. I will not belabour that point.

My second point is that the bill may not have the result that is desired by the minister. I think the effect of clauses 5 and 6 taken together, and especially clause 5 (1), is to bring about a complete change in the principle of the Maritime Freight Rates Act by making arbitrary changes by order in council without recourse to parliament, as is presently the case.

I also appreciate that in their task force report the Atlantic premiers suggested that there be selective help. I think they went a long way to get rid of this blanket subsidy of 20 per cent for movement within the selected territory and 30 per cent for movement without the selected territory. I think many commissions have always found this to be effective as a result of across-the-board increases and such matters.

I am in favour of selective assistance, but the four Atlantic premiers were very firm about this in the brief that was requested by the hon. member for Trinity. The political affiliations of the four Atlantic premiers are well known; three support the government and one does not. But they did reach unanimous agreement, and the summary of their brief is to the effect that nothing be