

Transportation Policies

● (2040)

The hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre believes, I think, that we should grant open-ended subsidies.

Mr. Benjamin: I did not suggest that at all.

Mr. Breau: I do not think the hon. member said anything different, and I was paying attention to his remarks. I think the hon. member, members of his party and others in this House, suggested that there should be no end to subsidies and deficits and that the taxpayer should pay for uneconomic services without knowing their cost.

Mr. Benjamin: None of them is economical.

Mr. Breau: In my view, and in the view of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang), we should be able to identify what it costs to transport a passenger from point A to point B. If a passenger is travelling on the train from Halifax to Montreal, say, he should know that it costs the taxpayer approximately \$40. I think the subsidy is close to that figure; I do not have the exact figures at my fingertips. But that subsidy is paid from taxes. Perhaps if that passenger knew it was costing him \$40 to travel by train, he might travel by air, car, or bus.

I have no quarrel with people wanting to travel by train. I enjoy train travel, but would sooner know how much it actually costs me to travel on a train. In saying this I am not suggesting we should not provide at least one basic service from coast to coast for passengers. I do not think the suggestions editorial writers and commentators made when the transport committee was in the maritimes, that our rail passenger service should be extended, make much sense. In my view, if every train passenger costs the taxpayer between \$35 and \$40 in subsidy, we should not expand the service. We ought to maintain the basic service, but should not expand it. Actually I think we should try to cut down uneconomic services.

Mr. Benjamin: But it is the basic service that costs all the money.

Mr. Breau: Answering the hon. member, I can only say that he and others of a like mind are being sucked in by those with a vested interest in railways.

Mr. Benjamin: No.

Mr. Breau: The hon. member says no, but I make that accusation. In the maritimes we heard people representing the railway unions appearing before the transport committee and arguing that train service should not only be maintained, but expanded. Some members of the Conservative party supported that point of view. They are entitled to their view. I understand the union's viewpoint, because it wants to protect its membership. Mr. Speaker, the interest of the public, of the citizens of Canada, is not always compatible with the interests of the unions. The public should not be taken in by the arguments of the unions. I think the railways should treat their employees humanely and sensibly, and as much as possible give them the rights of seniority; but we shall need to make adjustments to

[Mr. Breau.]

services. This will result in job dislocations. I agree that employees should be treated fairly. I have always supported fair and humane social and economic adjustment programs. That is why I am such a staunch supporter of the unemployment insurance program, the DREE program, and of other programs which will lessen the impact of job dislocation, or the dislocation of the life of a community.

I would go further, and support the establishment of adjustment programs for the benefit of communities which have depended on railway service and lost that service; for such communities will lose taxes as well as services. In my view it is foolish to maintain services which can only operate at a deficit or with a subsidy.

Mr. Benjamin: Would you include the air lines?

Mr. Breau: Yes. In some instances it is foolish to maintain such a service. I will deal with the hon. member's point in a moment. It is ludicrous to operate DC-9's, costing between \$6 million and \$7 million, on the Montreal-Ottawa run, especially when many flights carry no more than 30 people. Air Canada should not subsidize this unprofitable route with what it earns on more profitable runs. Air Canada should discontinue such routes or services and replace them with bus service. I fly regularly, at least two or three times a month, to the maritimes. Since I know what it costs the taxpayer to fly DC-9's from Ottawa to Montreal half empty, I would rather use a bus and perhaps take half an hour or three quarters of an hour more over-all. You must wait to get a good connection at Dorval, and wait at other points; therefore, I would rather take a bus from Ottawa. The cost of that bus service would be minimal. The capital cost of the bus is in the vicinity of \$250,000; in addition, you must pay the driver perhaps \$300 or \$400 per week, and pay a certain amount for fuel. But that cost will be much lower than the cost of flying an expensive aircraft for which you must make a huge capital outlay and pay large operating and fuel costs.

I say that our transport system should be rationalized, which is exactly what the minister is trying to do, and I admire him for it. I hope he sticks to his program. I hope he disregards the unrealistic and sometimes nonsensical suggestions of the opposition. It is normal that it should speak on behalf of people who have a vested interest in maintaining the present service, and try to embarrass the government. That is the political game. But the people are not foolish. They realize that when a service is uneconomic, they pay for it with their taxes. Therefore it is the government's duty to rationalize these services.

I return to the situation in northeastern New Brunswick. I am not against the concept of providing a subsidy for Eastern Provincial Airways; but if Eastern Provincial is to have a subsidy from the government, it should provide both services previously mentioned to northern New Brunswick, that is to say, local air service and service to Montreal. If they don't want to do it they should let the market determine if the system is viable, let the market set the rates, and be prepared not to accept a subsidy.