

*Government Orders*

● (1535)

These measures may jeopardize the competitiveness of ports along the St. Lawrence and of the shipping industry as a whole. Furthermore, part III of the budget estimates includes provisions to merge the Canadian Coast Guard fleet with Fisheries and Oceans, to delegate certain ship inspection activities to classification societies, to transfer to the provinces responsibility for inland waters of lesser importance and for more sound management of public ports, with the potential elimination of certain facilities.

This budget also provides for an increase in service fees, which is tantamount to a hidden tax to be paid by people using such services. This measure targets shipping services of course. Services provided by the Coast Guard benefit the public and for this reason fees for such services should not be increased. An increase in fees for these services, which limit the number of ice jams on the St. Lawrence, would prevent the Coast Guard from saving Canadian lives, ensuring navigation safety and would increase the risk of ecological accidents on the St. Lawrence.

In conclusion, such a fee structure would limit the competitiveness of Quebec ports vis-à-vis their American counterparts and the transport minister and the federal government have known this for a long time. The transport committee, of which I am deputy chairman, is currently undertaking a tour of the country's principal ports. In particular, we have visited Montreal, Quebec City and Mont-Joli in Quebec. We have heard clearly that higher rates would put an end to traffic on the St. Lawrence. Shipowners will prefer to unload their cargo in Halifax, or to forge on to ports in Boston, New York or Baltimore.

Is that the end result the minister hopes to attain? Stem traffic on the St. Lawrence? Steer traffic towards Maritime or American ports? Could it be that he is trying to scare Quebecers by a vision of what could be in store if they separated? It is not fear that has kept Quebecers in confederation for so many years, but the hope that they would be treated fairly, which decision-makers have failed to keep alive.

Quebecers are intelligent enough to figure out what the current government is up to, in particular the Liberal Party of Canada, which has always tried and is still trying to ruin Quebec and to play favourites with other provinces. My case in point is the closing of the Coast Guard college in Sydney, while the Quebec Marine Institute in Rimouski or, for that matter, other institutes in other provinces could have very easily done the same work. This duplication is costing \$10 million per year to provincial institutions which could easily have taken over the job.

Now, on to privatizing CN. Canadian National is a Crown corporation that has served Canadians for many years. It is one of the institutions that has made it possible for Canadians from coast to coast to communicate with each other. If it were not for

the railways, Western Canada probably would not have been developed to the extent that it has. The government now intends to sell CN, under the pretense that the decision will give society the flexibility needed to quickly make strategic decisions on operations and investments.

Is this an admission by the Minister of Finance that his government is not in a position to make strategic decisions? The sale of CN could cause many problems. Before selling off our economic development tools, we must take several precautions. According to the Nault report, some preparation work must be carried out before CN can be sold, namely reducing the debt, increasing profits and rationalizing the network.

First of all, the eventual buyer must be required to protect the rights of the Canadian people. Let us also keep in mind that the Nault report favours an Air Canada-like privatization process. We will have the opportunity to review these issues and to question the Minister of Transport both in the House and in committee. With regard to the national airport policy, we are told that airport commercialization will continue. Six national airports have already been transferred to local management.

The Quebec government will have to support local groups from small municipalities who want to enter into negotiations with Ottawa. As you can appreciate, Quebec taxpayers will again have to foot the bill for this federal policy.

● (1540)

In conclusion, from what I just said, you can understand that I am far from enthused by the budget trends regarding the Canadian air, sea and ground transportation sector.

This government shows its total lack of imagination. International financial players called for cuts, but the government cut indiscriminately, hitting seniors and the disadvantaged especially hard.

For over a year, we have been asking the minister to establish an integrated transport policy in Canada. This policy would determine what should be transported by rail, by ship, by plane and by road. Without being authoritarian and inflexible, this policy could provide for fiscal incentives favouring the best means of transportation.

Most of the countries in the world are developing rail transportation because it is the cheapest. Here in Canada, we remove rail tracks everywhere and convert them to bike paths. We let trucks with excessive loads onto our roads. The roads are being destroyed and the provinces must invest enormous amounts to maintain them.

Yesterday, I read an editorial by a great Quebecer and Canadian entitled "Imperial Federalism". What an appropriate headline to describe the federal government, whether Conservative or Liberal. They act without consulting, lead by fear, and always repeat the same mistakes. That is Canadian imperialism for you.