

Transportation is a vital economic lifeline to the future of this country, so why does the government want to hide the information and not give us the report? Is it because they are the governing class? Are they saying, "We have the right to rule: we are the masters"? You would almost think they were the only people who had good ideas; but it is obvious, because of their failure to respond to the transportation needs of this country, that they are bankrupt of ideas. They need some help, and we are prepared to give it. It is rather unfortunate that the government found it necessary to hide this document. There is some very good information in it which could be used to deal with discrepancies and anomalies in freight rates as they affect regions. Why, then, the secrecy? I hope the minister will respond to this question.

A series of studies is going on at the present time, but the minister gives various answers to questions. That is why he gets into trouble, of course; but he can also get out of trouble, because one's interpretation of his approach depends on which answer you read. In one case he indicated that all the studies were completed, and in another answer he indicated that maybe one or two had been completed.

Mr. Speaker, three or four basic studies arose out of the deliberations of the western economic opportunities conference. For example, the equitable pricing proposal advanced by the province of Alberta and its system of freight rate structures were put forward for consideration. I believe that study was completed. Why, then, was it not tabled and made public? There was the Manitoba destination principle, another approach to the pricing structure of freight rates. There was the roadbed study which I understand has been completed. Why have these studies not been disclosed? After all, they were paid for by the taxpayers of Canada. Surely, with transportation in the mess that it is, it behooves the government to bring forward information so that we can all look at it and decide what is the best approach to the problem. We have a great deal of concern about this government's failure to bring us up to date on the progress being made.

I was quite amused by the minister's response to some of the questions asked in committee when we were dealing with this very important subject. He indicated that the provinces were opposed to tabling these studies and, frankly, I think that was a rather supercilious answer. The federal government paid for a large portion of these studies; national transportation policy is a federal responsibility, and it seems to me rather ridiculous to suggest that because the provinces are opposed to it we should not have the information. In the final analysis, this parliament will have to judge the legislative mechanisms brought forth to overhaul our national transportation policy.

We have lack of disclosure and lack of action by the government in many areas. For example, what has happened in the rapeseed matter which the CTC has been considering for some time and which has been in the minister's hands since 1970? It was found that, pursuant to section 23 of the National Transportation Act, the freight rate applying to that commodity was prejudicial to the public interest. The CTC brought down an interim decision and the provinces and all applicants appealed that decision. They asked the minister to reconsider it, as they

Railway Act

are entitled to do under certain provisions of the National Transportation Act.

● (1240)

I think the matter was referred to the minister in March, 1974, and he has been sitting on it since. Nothing has been done, and ministerial inaction has been holding up the final decision of the CTC: the question is in limbo. If the government adopts as leisurely an attitude in redressing other freight rate anomalies and discrepancies, some freight rates will not be changed much before the year 2000.

Let me now refer to the matter of rail line abandonment. According to the announcement of December 30, the status of almost 6,000 miles of track will remain frozen until December 31, 1975. Almost three months have elapsed since the announcement, but the government has not provided guidelines and terms of reference for the evolution process. It has not told us how these lines will be evaluated or what the study procedures will be with regard to the 6,000 miles of track. What is the reason for the secrecy? Surely the government knows how the matter is to be dealt with.

Mr. Paproski: That's where the hon. member is wrong; it does not know.

Mr. Mazankowski: In the meantime, the status of 6,000 miles of track is left in limbo, as it were. Economic development in certain regions served by these lines is a possibility but that development will not go ahead under present conditions of uncertainty. I do not say that the government should guarantee that the 6,000 miles of track will remain in use until the year 2000. That is not the point. I am merely pointing out that delaying the decision with regard to the 6,000 miles of track until 1975 has created confusion, uncertainty and frustration.

Governments are not short of advice. Advice is provided by provincial committees and technical committees. The minister in charge of the Wheat Board (Mr. Lang) established a study group to look at transportation. In addition, other study groups have been sponsored by the Minister of Transport. We have available the services of all kinds of study groups and technical and advisory committees. Extra technical staff in the minister's office is available for advice. Despite the workings of all these groups, there is a dearth of information. Occasionally we see a press release which is put out for political consumption, but we do not know the hard facts. The minister refuses to answer questions asked in this House; I suspect he does not know the answers.

The minister has failed to inform members of this House where he stands with respect to the over-all transportation policy which the country was promised during the election campaign and again in the Speech from the Throne. So if we sound frustrated and angry, people should not be surprised: we are frustrated and angry because our requests for information are refused. We agree that transportation is in a mess. We want to work with the minister, but the initiative can only come from the government side. The government's inaction is making us angry, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stanfield: The government is like a secret society.