

*National Transportation Policy*

because often it is a bulk material which is involved and water borne transportation is the logical way to carry it.

Let me say, in case hon. gentlemen opposite from the Atlantic provinces may feel that all is lost, in the sense that nobody is thinking about these problems, that the committee was quite frank in indicating the basic problem was not one of dollars and cents in terms of expenditures. They recognized there had been extremely significant expenditures both on roads and highways and on various forms of subsidies—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. I regret having to interrupt the minister but his time has expired, and I believe the order made by the House was that no additional time be granted.

**Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre):** Mr. Speaker, two or three times in each session of Parliament the subject of Canada's national transportation systems comes before the House. Historically, for many years—

**Mr. Nowlan:** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

**Mr. Speaker:** Is this a point of order?

**Mr. Nowlan:** Yes. I appreciate the order made by the House, but during his remarks the minister did say that he hoped to table that second report of the federal provincial agency, from which I thought he was taking some of his remarks.

**Mr. Speaker:** That was my understanding also. The minister did ask that it be tabled at the end of his remarks. Has the minister leave to table these documents?

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Benjamin:** Mr. Speaker, for many years the problems of Canada's national transportation systems have remained pretty well the same. There has not really been any fundamental change in the problems, and I suggest there has not been any fundamental change in the cures or solutions put forward by either of the old line parties which have taken turns in governing the country for the past 100 years.

I want to say to the minister that there is no argument at all with him, or with anybody else, about Parliament, cabinet or himself interfering with the day-to-day operations of the railways and airlines in our national transportation systems. No one would suggest for one moment that this House, or he himself, should attempt to run the railways and airlines on a day-to-day basis. That has never been the question or the problem. That is why I say that that is a strawman. No one is suggesting that this minister or this government do that. What is at issue is that unless we have a fundamental change in the policies, in the framework within which our national transportation systems must function, then we will continue to have the problems we have now.

The minister speaks about the Canadian Transport Commission, and about how it has lived up to the requirements of the National Transportation Act. I do not doubt that for a moment. But, Mr. Speaker, that act was designed to militate against the best interests of Canadians in different regions. It was designed to militate in

favour of something that the minister himself said was a profit oriented transportation system.

When one speaks of the CTC, one is reminded of the story about the skunk and the chickens. When you appear before the CTC and want a hearing, file an appeal, make an application on behalf of a railway or an airline, of course the Commission goes through all the formalities required by law. But it is something like what happens when a skunk gets into the chicken coop. The skunk takes several chickens back home to his family. When they get there the chickens say, "We want to lodge an appeal." The skunk says, "Fine. We will give you a proper hearing." The chickens then get a proper hearing, according to all the rules and regulations laid down by skunks, and at the end the chickens still get eaten.

The same thing applies when the CTC hears applications for the abandonment of rail lines and for the closure of agencies. Last winter scores of agencies were closed in western Canada. Even the personal representations and briefs, presented by members of this House and members of the other place to that august body, the CTC, were given short shrift. Within a matter of days the railroads were given the go ahead to close scores of agencies. In effect, Mr. Speaker, we were eaten again. I submit that until there is a fundamental change in the policy and the framework within which our national transportation systems operate, we will continue to have this problem.

• (1600)

Our country is 4,500 miles wide, is nearly 4 million square miles in area, but has only 22 million people, and yet we continue to put up with a transportation system that might work in a country one-quarter that size with at least ten times that population. In addition, Mr. Speaker, the geographic reality is that not only are we that large in size and small in numbers, but we refuse as a nation to face up to the other reality. We are a northern nation and seem to be incapable of acting accordingly. We build roads, houses and automobiles meant for one or two thousand miles south of here. We operate transportation and communication systems that still cannot cope adequately with our geography and climate. One could cite all the defects of rail transportation through the Rocky Mountains this past winter. To hear the minister in charge of the Wheat Board (Mr. Lang) talk, one would think that this was the first winter we ever had rock or snow slides. Our transportation system is incapable of coping with our geography.

In so far as transportation is concerned, we are a nation that has succumbed to economic rules and conventional practices that other nations gave up a long time ago. We continue to abide by these rules and practices whose example and history neither meet our needs nor suit the requirements of a northern country as vast and thinly settled as Canada. If we are to remain a united country because we can communicate easily and cheaply from one end of it to the other—without "Ma Bell"—United because we can transport our people in terms of numbers and costs that any Canadian can afford, united in that we can move goods from Halifax to Vancouver at freight charges that apply equitably to all Canadians, then one of the first priorities for a united and independent Canada has to be