Atlantic Region Transport Policy

in his area and as for myself, as a member for a neighbouring area adjacent to the Maritime provinces, I congratulate him for having expressed his views and those of the citizens of my area. I remind the Minister of Transport (Mr. Jamieson) and the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand) that the Lower St. Lawrence area and the Gaspé peninsula have approximately the same problems as the Maritime provinces. Those problems should not be left to experts who, despite their high qualifications, live far from us. It would be preferable to listen to our people who have their own way of expressing themselves and who know what they want as far as transportation is concerned.

● (4:30 p.m.)

[*English*]

Mr. Herb Breau (Gloucester): Mr. Speaker, I take pleasure in speaking in this debate on the motion put forward by the hon. member for Moncton (Mr. Thomas). I shall be brief. I know the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall) wishes to speak, and I thank him for yielding the floor to me because I have to leave soon.

The hon. member's motion is a positive one. He talks about a comprehensive policy for transportation in the Atlantic provinces. He talks about modern solutions to present and future problems, and he proposes that the government should introduce legislation this session to implement an Atlantic transportation policy. It is not very clear to me whether he is suggesting there should be a study of Atlantic transportation separate from any studies of a national transportation policy. Like the hon. member and others in his party, I want transportation policies in this country which will benefit the Maritimes, because I believe that if Canada is to remain a federal state, if it is to remain one country, certain regional considerations must be borne in mind.

For example, the Maritime Freight Rates Act seems to be a constitutional concession to the Maritimes. I think it is evident that Parliament has in the past accorded preferential treatment to the Maritimes in the field of transportation. This had to be the case. While a national transportation policy might be good from a national point of view, and while the philosophy of encouraging competition might be a good way of ensuring an efficient transportation system over a large area, it could be most detrimental to regional effort and to the Atlantic provinces in particular.

The hon. member for Moncton complained that his representations were falling on deaf ears. I do not think they are. Some action has been taken both by this government and by former governments to assist transportation in the Maritimes in different ways. After all, transportation does not consist only of rail freight and passenger services. It involves an infrastructure. In my constituency, in my part of New Brunswick, I would say that priority in transportation centres on the building of roads; I would place this before improvements in passenger services by air or by plane or the lowering of freight rates. Unless we can travel over good, all-weather highways our region cannot compete with other parts of Canada nor, for that matter, with other parts of the

Maritimes. We have to consider government action in this light and not only as it affects freight rates.

On the subject of freight rates, I too at times deplore increases in those rates. I would like everything to go down.

An hon. Member: What about indemnities?

Mr. Breau: I did not hear that remark, but since it came from a west coast member I will not listen to it.

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Breau: I am thinking only in terms of Atlantic transportation policy. If there are freight rate increases, it does not mean that the government does not wish to help the Maritimes in the transportation field. We have seen actions by this government in the last few years which have been of help to the Maritimes; for example, the Atlantic Region Freight Assistance Act which provided assistance to truckers within the select territory and leaving this area. While this action may not have reduced freight rates or trucking rates, it is a fact that now some goods may be transmitted more cheaply by truck; trucks are now in a position to compete more favourably, on a selective basis, in the transportation of goods provided a certain volume is available or if other stipulations are met. The fact that trucking rates have not risen leaves me with the impression that increases may have been averted, because it has been a traditional pattern in the Maritimes for trucking rates to increase soon after railway freight rates are increased.

I do not have the figures before me to prove this contention, but I believe the Atlantic provinces have received more assistance per capita from the federal government toward the establishment of transportation infrastructure than any other region of Canada. I would cite the fifth annual report of the Economic Council which indicates that the four Atlantic provinces received a larger per capita share of federal transportation expenditures since 1964-65 than any other region. So there has been some action.

What has happened is that a lot of the investment in infrastructure through the Atlantic Region Freight Assistance Act, and so on has not necessarily helped only the Atlantic provinces. There is a great deal of travel and migration from the Atlantic provinces to Toronto and Montreal. It may be cheaper now to bring products to Montreal, but it has also increased the incentive for Montreal companies to sell products in the Maritimes. Investors from the west coast can now come to the Atlantic provinces and compete at every level. Whilst this helps us, it also has the effect of giving a boost to anyone in central Canada who wants to go to the Maritimes to sell, manufacture or take over businesses there.

● (4:40 p.m.)

We have not been hit as hard by the CNR in the reduction of passenger train services. The Atlantic region receives a $1 million subsidy for air service, although I think this includes Labrador. This subsidy is given to Quebec Air and EPA to help promote their routes. Par-