

Transportation

settle by introducing the bill we passed the other day.

● (7:10 p.m.)

[English]

Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Halifax): I join with a number of speakers who have preceded me in extending to the minister my personal compliments on having given birth to this long-awaited baby—although it is not exactly a baby; it is probably one of the most far-reaching pieces of legislation ever to have come before this house.

I am a young man, but for the last ten or 15 years I have followed the progress of parliament and of the various governments of Canada in their pursuit of a national transportation policy which would embrace all forms of transportation and the general field of communications. What we have before us now for approval in principle is indeed the basis of worth-while legislation. I could go on to praise many aspects of it, but I am afraid that like most members of the house I have not yet had the opportunity to avail myself of expert opinion as to the effect it is likely to have on certain traditional positions.

As junior member for the constituency of Halifax it might be redundant for me to place on record the full extent of the effect this legislation in its present form is likely to have on the port of Halifax. It is difficult to describe in a few words the importance of transportation to the port, to the local economy and indeed to the entire province of Nova Scotia. Its role is a dominant one. Around our port and the movement of goods through the port, around our military and naval establishments centre all the hopes we have in Halifax, and that general area, for an advance at a pace “commensurate with the rest of Canada”, to use a phrase from the bill itself. In this light it is obviously of importance that the consequences of this bill should be understood clearly and that at least one or two assurances should be forthcoming.

The provisions of this measure will affect, among others, longshoremen, customs and immigration staff, railway employees, freight workers and maintenance men together with a vast range of associated interests. It is probably true to say that from 25,000 to 30,000 people derive a livelihood from an occupation directly related to transportation.

In terms of tonnage, the general cargo volume has been running somewhere around 1,250,000 tons in the last year or two. Perhaps I should include the value to Halifax of bulk cargo shipments which have a direct dollar

[Mr. Mongrain.]

value to the port and to the local economy of at least \$18 million each year—not an insubstantial sum by any means, and this estimate is probably a conservative one.

During the past two or three years we have seen a levelling off of the second major factor in our economy—the income deriving from the military role of the area. For many years there was a continuing increase in the effect of the military dollar upon our economy. This is declining every day. Indeed it is almost gone. But these are two factors which are directly associated with rail transportation, and because of our isolated position they must receive first and primary consideration in my mind as a representative of Halifax.

As I understand the bill before us, which we are being asked to approve in principle, no assurance is given beyond the stated two-year period, notwithstanding the valuable work now being carried out by the special Atlantic provinces study group, and the recommendations it may make to the government at some time in the future. There is nothing in the bill as far as I can see which would protect the traditional position of the maritimes, and if the Minister of Transport thinks otherwise perhaps he would be good enough to say so.

Mr. Pickersgill: Since the hon. member was good enough to invite me to intervene perhaps he would allow me to draw his attention to the fact that the rates set under the Maritime Freight Rates Act are not altered in any way. The new protection which was introduced only in the last couple of years in connection with Atlantic and Eastern Grain rates is contained in this legislation, and no rates in the region can be changed at all for two years, and then only those which were frozen a very few years ago under the Freight Rates Reduction Act.

Mr. Forrestall: I thank the minister for that reply but I am still not certain that what he has said is the assurance we are looking for. The minister knows as well as I do that our competitive position under the existing Maritime Freight Rates Act puts us into a very broad category and places us at a disadvantage of some 30 per cent compared with other areas. This has been the subject of many letters to the minister; he is familiar with it and I do not think I need elaborate. It will be difficult for me and for most maritime members to give the bill support in principle. It is not good enough for the minister to give assurances. It must be in the act.