

Transportation Policies

blatant inequities, it is important that maximum rates be established and that the commission be in a position to determine whether the rates applied are reasonable or not. As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, I regret that this bill gives no explicit authority to the Canadian Transport Commission to judge whether there is a reasonable delay between the moment the railway company takes over the item and the moment the item reaches its destination. I therefore urge the minister to consider amending the end of his bill to include provisions to that effect. Shippers would be sure that the company would not accept overdue delays in shipments. I know for a fact that it is one of the major areas of concern for all those who have to use freight transport on a regular basis.

At that time I also asked repeatedly of the then Minister of Transport to consider reducing shipping delays. I can give a concrete example to show how much a transport policy which accounts for the particular needs of isolated areas can be important for the social and economic future of one region. Mr. Speaker, I did listen a moment ago to members discussing the transport problems they encounter in their own region.

As far as we in northwestern Quebec are concerned, if we dare ask either the department or the Canadian Transport Commission how it is that an area like ours where over 200,000 people live cannot have a better railway service, the answer those people can give us is, of course, that the railway and particularly the passenger service in that area are not viable. Personally, Mr. Speaker, I am not prepared to accept that answer. But what can be said about an area as remote as ours where the only two adequate means of transport at present are the plane or the automobile when one thinks that only going from Ottawa to the closest place in my riding takes just about 15 hours by railway. Those same people are telling us that it is not viable. Of course, and it is understandable that it is not viable.

When one thinks that today, in 1977, we can still travel with locomotives dating back to the years 1900-1925—and I know what I am talking about here because I had an opportunity to take the train from Cochrane, Ontario, to Rouyn with a transfer in Taschereau, and I had an opportunity, which might never re-occur, to board a train where the seats were made of wood. When I say that the minister cannot prove that such a means of transport is viable, I would ask him to try to shorten the time that we have to spend in those cars.

Mr. Speaker, hundreds of groups, organizations, citizens in my riding are now fighting for improvement. I know this does not come under federal jurisdiction but still I would like to mention it any way. I said earlier that we had only two means of transport—the plane and the automobile. I would like to talk here a bit about what I have been most concerned with for about two years, and that is the road from Montreal to Val-d'Or. Last year, before the provincial election, we managed to get all our local provincial members of parliament under one roof to fight for a better road. Everybody, all parties recognize that the highway is in a real mess. Of course, Mr. Speaker, this is an area, as I was saying, of provincial jurisdiction, but it is also an issue of transport policy which concerns

[Mr. Caouette (Villeneuve).]

all those northwesterners who travel this highway. Mr. Speaker, the condition of the road is so bad that I do not even dare use my car to cover the distance to my constituency every weekend, for heavy trucks travelling from Val-d'Or to Montreal have been banned from this road for the past five years, and—

Mr. Demers: Go and tell the PQ that this is a provincial responsibility!

Mr. Caouette (Villeneuve): That is what I said a while ago. Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right when he says that this is a provincial responsibility, and I repeat, he is right.

But, if this matter comes under provincial jurisdiction, why is it that in another field such as that of education the federal government interferes to finance teaching in the provinces? The federal government should be able to help financially the provinces whose budgets are insufficient to ensure the creation of a basic highway network to join outlying areas to the larger centres, especially in the area that I mentioned earlier, the one I represent in the House.

The federal government spends a lot of money for higher education even though this comes under provincial jurisdiction. In my opinion, it could just as easily offer credits or subsidies to the provinces to improve the highway networks when this becomes necessary. As I said some time ago, even if this comes under provincial jurisdiction, the increase in the price of gasoline, as the hon. member who has just spoken said, the oil price increase comes under federal jurisdiction. Yet, people in northwestern Quebec have to pay for this increase, even though they were not even consulted to see if they were prepared to pay more. I would ask the minister to consult his colleague, the Minister of Finance, to consider using the revenue generated by higher gas prices in northwestern Quebec to help the provincial government provide suitable roads for the people that I have the honour to represent, so that they may get where they want safely.

As concerns Highway 117, the provincial government has been saying for years that they do not have the money for repairs. Yet, the situation is terrible and greatly hinders the economic development of northwestern Quebec. Mr. Speaker, this is why I believe our national transportation policy cannot ignore this problem which is extremely important for the survival of northwestern Quebec.

I would therefore urge the Minister of Transport to consider meeting his provincial counterparts as soon as possible with a view to establishing some form of financial cooperation to improve the road system in the area. I am convinced that all the people in northwestern Quebec would be grateful to the Canadian government if this led to concrete results.

Mr. Speaker, in a somewhat different line of thought, I would like to refer to a problem submitted to me by Nordair aviation, a company serving my area. Nordair president André Lizotte wrote to me recently about a clause that was inserted in their operating licence by the Canadian Transport Commission. Under that condition, Nordair is prevented from providing a direct flight between Montreal and Val-d'Or only. The