

Atlantic Regional Freight Assistance Act

traffic... and the commission shall certify to the minister the estimated saving to the Consolidated Revenue Fund—

In other words, under this provision we will know what the saving is going to be. Since the hon. member is a lawyer I am sure he will agree that we could not write into legislation that every single dollar will be applied in that precise sense. All I can say is that I think the clauses, when read in sequence, indicate the intent of the bill, and I have tried to reinforce that with my commitment today.

Mr. Nowlan: We are having a general discussion of the bill, though these are matters that I was going to raise when we reach clause 5. The difficulty about this formula is twofold. First of all, there is still no direction. The minister has said it is difficult to do this legislatively, but bills are either mandatory or permissive. They can provide either that things "may" be done or that they "shall" be done.

• (12:10 p.m.)

More important than that is the question of how you are to bring about savings under clause 5(2). How are we going to meet the situation? It is fair to ask this about an interim measure. The minister must know that ever since 1927, or ever since the end of the war, the Maritime Freight Rates Act has not met the problems of the Atlantic area. Surely after all the commissions, studies and premiers' task forces we could have come up with something better than this bill. It seems to me that here you have legislation saying that what you take from Peter you will pay to Paul. It is not good enough for the government to say that by shifting these interim subsidies around it will help the shipper, consignee or carrier. Under this bill we can see a situation in which subsidies are reduced.

Let us consider the provision saying that the commission shall certify to the minister the estimated saving to the fund. That is to be found in clause 5(2). Last year maritime freight rates subsidies amounted to \$14 million. Let us say that this year, by shifting the payments around and by juggling a bit, the minister can bring about a saving of \$4 million. Therefore we reduce the total amount paid by \$4 million and pay out altogether \$10 million. Let us say that something happens next year. The minister may go back to Newfoundland or be transferred to another, more challenging portfolio or, better still, the government may be defeated.

[Mr. Jamieson.]

Mr. Jamieson: Then the hon. member will not have to worry.

Mr. Nowlan: But the people of the Atlantic region will still be worried. For any number of reasons we may get into a situation in which there cannot be implemented any comprehensive transportation policy for the maritimes. At any rate, let us say that in the second year of the shift, and remember we are dealing now with a base figure of \$10 million and not \$14 million, there is another saving or another shifting of \$2 million. That will reduce the payment in the second year to \$8 million, the \$2 million involved here being paid to shippers, carriers or consignees in accordance with the select territory principle. In the third year the minister might very well say, "Let's cut everything down." We could very well face a situation in which payments are reduced not to \$8 million or \$10 million, but to \$2 million. This bill has implicit in it that danger.

I say that if we are to improve on the Maritime Freight Rates Act let us bring in some real improvements. We have had the Maritime Freight Rates Act for 60 years and, as legislators, I do not think we should agree to any open-ended type of arrangement under which the amount of assistance could be reduced, say, to \$2 million. I do not say the minister would do this intentionally, but that could be the result of a juggling of the administration.

Mr. Jamieson: With respect, Mr. Chairman, my hon. friend is making a good argument but in my opinion it does not have any substance. In the first instance, the outbound or westbound rate is still rigidly and emphatically included in the bill.

Mr. Nowlan: That is right.

Mr. Jamieson: On top of that we are going to provide 30 per cent for truckers going out. So there is no likelihood that the sum paid out will go down. That sum has to go up.

What I said so far as the interim subsidy is concerned—and I explained why we cannot spell this out in legislation; it must be self-evident—was that the step we are taking here represents to me one in a logical sequence. We say the amount must be determined and specified. Where there is any change in the interim, it must be determined and specified and it becomes a matter of public record that that amount has been specified. Then, too, we have a committee and we shall say to that committee, "You can take these moneys and