

*Transportation*

something in the way of an assurance from the minister about what kind of decision is going to be rendered in the future on these eastern rates. We want an assurance that our ports are going to be maintained at the highest possible level.

One who comes from the maritimes does not have to live in either Saint John, New Brunswick or Halifax, Nova Scotia to appreciate that the level of prosperity in those two areas has a good deal to do with the level of prosperity in the whole of the maritimes. Naturally, therefore, we are anxious to know more about what will be done with those eastern rates in the future. There are so many complexities in this bill, so many things to which we do not have the answer and may not for some time to come, that I do not really believe it is fair to ask a member to vote now. I think the bill should go to the standing committee, where it would receive scrutiny which would be of benefit both to it and to a national transportation policy. Members would then be in the position of making an educated assessment of the bill and would be able to make a determination as to whether or not it should receive their support.

● (8:10 p.m.)

By asking members to vote now I think the government is placing them in the position of being able to vote only one way, and that is against the bill. I say that because it is much safer to vote against something with regard to which you do not possess all the answers. One should be in the position of making a sensible and realistic assessment, one which would be of benefit to the nation as a whole. I do not think that any member of this house is anxious to vote against any legislation. We are here to endeavour to produce the very best legislation which can be made available to the nation. We are not "agin" anything. We are for reform, for the kind of reform that is going to be of benefit to our nation in its development. But at this stage it is hardly responsible procedure to ask members to indicate their views about a piece of legislation as complicated as Bill No. C-231.

Let us take a look at the history behind this bill so as to realize how complex it is; that is, if we are to judge from the length of time which the government had the MacPherson royal commission report before it before bringing in this legislation. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, had this bill been before parliament prior to last week this nation might very well not have been faced with a rail

strike. The government and the minister considered the policy such a complicated and difficult one that they not only presented one bill which was then withdrawn, but have allowed this bill to come before the house only at a time of national crisis. I am not at all sure when the house would have got the bill had it not been for the rail strike. It may very well be that the minister would have brought it in this fall anyway; this is what he indicated; but the minister having found it possible to prepare the bill and bring it before us while a rail crisis was in progress, I cannot for the life of me see why he could not have brought it in before the recess. Had he done so it might very well have resulted in a negotiated settlement between the railways and the employees, and thus averted the damage that has been done to the economy by the strike that ensued.

I hope that the minister, who comes from the Atlantic area, or I should say, to be more specific, who represents a constituency in the Atlantic area, will give consideration to developing the same kind of philosophy as that embodied in the Maritime Freight Rates Act in regard to the various other forms of transportation that are becoming so important to the economy of the Atlantic area. There is today a tremendous development in the handling of freight by the air carriers. Here again we are in the position of having almost a monopoly situation, certainly with respect to transporting our goods from any part of the Atlantic provinces to any other part of Canada outside the province of Quebec. Surely if the government believes in the philosophy behind the Maritime Freight Rates Act it should be doing something to see that our advantages are equalized in the carriage of air freight just as much as in the carriage of rail freight.

While as yet we do not have the great benefit of pipe lines, I am sure that these will come. There again the same type of philosophy as embodied in the Maritime Freight Rates Act should be extended to the operation of pipe lines. So far as truck transportation is concerned, it is our only alternative today. Since the bill is to regulate this form of transportation in the future, surely this legislation should once again give us the same kind of protection and provide the same kind of philosophy for highway transportation as it recognizes for rail transportation.

I hope that the result of this legislation will be of real benefit to the Atlantic provinces. I hope it will spur our development and that