

Transportation

tive opposition made it clear they were going to filibuster it and extend the days of debate of that bill virtually endlessly.

Mr. Mazankowski: Talk to your colleague!

Mr. Lang: These amendments to the National Transportation Act stated in clause 3 proposals and principles affecting transportation which were carefully agreed upon and negotiated as being perfectly satisfactory with the premiers of the Atlantic provinces. They contained provisions in regard to freight rates and controlling maximum rates which directly reflect western interests. One of the reasons this bill did not carry on to its conclusion despite the filibuster was that my colleagues were amazed at the fact that though it was a bill in direct answer to western demands to deal with short haul-long haul rate discrepancies, western demands to put in place control over freight rates which are too high in some cases, that very bill was filibustered by western Tories one after the other.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Vegreville said he did not like our marine policy. We have elaborated a specific policy with regard to shipping which in many of its aspects is designed in detail to meet the needs of today. The fact is that shipping conferences, arrangements between nations and potential United Nations arrangements put us in a position where we may need an ability to respond, and we have indicated our intention to come forward with legislation in that regard.

Of course, there are specific interests which would like us to take additional measures. We have indicated our special preference for Canadian shipping in the Arctic, and this can be a very important matter in the development of Arctic technology and Canadian shipping. But we have repeated our view that as a matter of policy low-cost shipping is extremely important to Canada, to its importers and to its exporters. If the Tories do not yet know it, this country lives on its exports, its imports, its trade, and we do not want protectionist policies in regard to shipping any more than we want them anywhere else in trade.

We are creating an environment for shipping where we can protect ourselves while still gaining the advantage of the economy of lower-cost shipping in the world. We drew the line, and will draw the line, at the protection of ocean-going shipping which will cause higher prices to the shippers of Canadian goods.

● (1600)

The hon. member for Vegreville is laying the groundwork for his colleague from Dartmouth when he announces support for this kind of higher-cost shipping, but I am a little surprised that the hon. member for Vegreville would support that policy. Of course, it is a fact that we find one Conservative policy today cancelled tomorrow and a new one the following day, as we saw with regard to deficits and with regard to negotiating sovereignty-association. We also find the Conservative party enunciating on the same day two different policies for different

[Mr. Lang.]

parts of the country so that it can appear to have the best of both. That is perfectly suitable to a party in the opposition so long as it remains in the opposition, because that kind of lack of responsibility can be exercised only when a decision does not have to be made. The Conservative party can have it both ways in all parts of the country.

I suppose the hon. member for Vegreville would make it sound as though we had done little with regard to transport in Canada, but I remind him of the operations of Canadian National Railways and Air Canada, both of which any non-partisan observer and perhaps even partisan ones—perhaps even some Tories—would admit are being operated more effectively and more sensibly and with more productivity today than ever before. In both cases—and I hope this does not offend my friends in the New Democratic Party—they are now being operated at a profit. Profit is, after all, a payment for capital invested, and I hope even a New Democrat would admit that you need a return on investment if you expect investment to continue.

It is true that with regard to Air Canada and Canadian National we could, as presumably we did in days gone by, say that they are government-owned and that the government will go on investing even if it does not get a return. Of course, where that was so unfair and wrong was that it discouraged proper management attitudes and effectiveness within those Crown corporations. It also was completely unfair to the competitors of the airline and the railway, whether competitors in trucking, on other railroads, other airlines and the like. Therefore, we are moving toward principles under which effective operations will be a test, and reasonable return on investment will be expected.

We have begun to see this happen. The hon. member for Vegreville did not mention VIA Rail, with which we have taken a completely new approach to rail passenger policy. We now have a management dedicated to trying to make good sense out of our rail passenger service and to offering it again to attract people back to rail as a way of moving about this country. We already find 15 per cent or so increases in the number of people riding, and this is while we have made only a beginning. We have made only a beginning because we have some new equipment, but the important new equipment, the ten new, light, rapid, comfortable and Canadian-made trains which are on order will be available for the track only in 1980. At that time we will see a whole new chance at offering service through VIA Rail. Surely we have made sense out of what had been a deteriorating rail passenger service, and we will continue to try to provide better and more effective service.

Incidentally, in the delicate and difficult negotiations in bringing VIA Rail together out of Canadian National and Canadian Pacific, and in having to deal with employees who were in both these railways and in part moving to the new railway, VIA Rail, we had some of the best working relationships with union leaders one could ever want to have in arriving at arrangements and agreements which they have said were an example for others to follow.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!