

Transportation Policies

Mr. Benjamin: I find it strange that the national government and the governments of ten provinces and two territories—so that includes all the political parties—are able to equalize the price of a bottle of whiskey. I am known as a fellow who enjoys the odd drink once a month.

The price of a bottle of whiskey at Yellowknife, Rankin Inlet and anywhere in Newfoundland, British Columbia or any other province is equalized, but when it comes to a quart of milk, a head of lettuce, a pound of tomatoes, a bag of flour, a tank of propane fuel, or a tank of heating oil, the principle of the user shall pay applies. My party and I contend that that is an indecent way to treat people in this country, and the governments of this country, of every province, or every territory, and in particular the Minister of Transport, are guilty of allowing this to continue. A system of equalized and/or subsidized freight rates which allows people a natural advantage in the production of agricultural products or mineral products whereby these products can be processed where they are found is just, decent, and fair.

Why is rapeseed processed in Toronto or Montreal? Not a bushel of it is grown there. Why can people not have fresh milk, fruit and vegetables in Labrador, in the Northwest Territories or in rural Saskatchewan for the same prices they can have them in downtown Regina or Toronto? The minister, his government and the official opposition should face up to the reality that no matter where you go in this world, competition in transportation does not work.

We should treat people fairly no matter where they live. If we are all part of this confederation, we should not charge \$4 for a dozen eggs in northern Canada or \$1.80 for two quarts of milk in Yellowknife. If we cannot do better under this kind of system, we should eliminate competition and profitability in transportation.

Mr. Breau: Who is going to pay for it?

Mr. Benjamin: The nation as a whole should share this cost. If hon. members do not mind this expression, it is called co-operation. It is even called co-operative federalism, or a co-operative commonwealth.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Herb Breau (Gloucester): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on this motion this evening dealing with a very important matter. Indeed, there are not many issues in Canada which give rise to so much emotion and so many political debates as transportation. I read once a paper referring to some research made on the political interventions of members from the Atlantic area since the beginning of Confederation up to 1971 which had shown that transportation was the matter more often discussed and dealt with by the members from the Atlantic area. Of course, in a country as big as Canada, it is normal that transportation would be constantly discussed.

I find it funny when I listen to hon. members such as the member for Regina-Lake Centre (Mr. Benjamin), who were shocked because a dozen eggs and a quart of milk are appar-

ently very costly in the north. Those people do not mention who should pay for transportation costs.

Mr. Benjamin: All of us, you dummy!

Mr. Breau: Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member could use expressions that are a bit more appropriate to Parliament than the ridiculous statement he has just made. I am simply asking who should pay for all those things. If I understand him correctly, he says that everyone should pay. I say that this is idealistic and that it is very well to suggest we should as much as possible in our society absorb all costs, taxes, transportation costs, the cost of living and the cost of basic necessities on the basis of the ability to pay.

However, Mr. Speaker, this distorts reality because, for instance, someone who settles in northern Canada does not have an income that is set on the basis of equality. His income is based on the market and if a worker in northern Canada has a recognized trade, he receives a higher income and receives certain benefits. It is quite unrealistic in my opinion to think that in a country like Canada it would be possible to equalize our transportation rates for products going to the north, for instance. I say this is an example of not very realistic interventions when I think of the contribution made this afternoon by the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall). I read with interest his statement before the Railway Committee of the Canadian Transport Commission when it was sitting in Halifax, and I read with interest the comments made in Moncton before this committee, which will be sitting in my constituency tomorrow.

It is quite ironical to see that those newspaper commentators and editorialists keep claiming that there is too much input on the part of the government in the economy and that this government should reduce its spendings. Hon. members opposite keep telling us that the government should reduce the number of instances when it takes action in economic matters. Those very same people are now telling us that railway passenger services between Halifax and Montreal should be maintained though they are obviously running at a deficit.

Actually, I have seen figures released no longer than six months ago showing that for each passenger travelling on the train from Halifax to Montreal, the Canadian taxpayer, through the federal treasury, has to pay some \$40 on top of the price of the ticket. Mr. Speaker, these are the very same people who claim that railway passenger services should be developed despite the prevailing situation. In my opinion, this amounts to promoting a policy that would be utterly unrealistic and lacking any common sense. It is obviously necessary to maintain a railway service stretching between Halifax and Montreal and probably from Montreal to Vancouver. However, it should not be necessary to maintain two or three itineraries, as together they are not profitable. I think it is quite unreasonable to talk about stepping up operations in this field while it has been clearly demonstrated that this would not be profitable. I suggest it is right to say that the government should maintain a railway service but stating that this service