

asked the minister about the progress being made on the recommendations of the committee. On December 16, as reported at page 2019 of *Hansard*, the minister stated that a great many of the recommendations had already been implemented and that others were in the process of being implemented. He went on to say that the committee was still meeting and that as recommendations were made they would be put into effect.

I would point out to the minister that although some of the recommendations have been implemented, for example, the subsidy has been extended to trucks—incidentally, there has not been a decrease in rates that the minister prophesied—the rates on the Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island ferries have been equalized and the subsidy has been reduced to 17.5 per cent, the most vital and basic recommendation has not yet been acted upon. The whole basis of the Premiers' report was that the subsidies should not be altered unless and until equivalent transportation assistance was provided for the shippers.

We on this side of the House are fearful that what we indicated to the minister during the debate on the Atlantic Region Freight Assistance Act is now beginning to happen; there are indications that subsidies will be reduced and gradually phased out completely without equivalent assistance being provided. I therefore urge the minister to take immediate action to have regulations drawn up to provide special transportation assistance and to carry out what the federal-provincial committee recommended, that additional financing be provided during the first years of the subsidy phase-out.

I suggest that there are several ways in which this could be done. It could be done through supplementary estimates, as in the case of subsidies to the truckers, or the minister could use the balance of the funds which were originally provided to reimburse the railways when the freight rates freeze was imposed. At that time, as the minister knows, approximately \$12 million were voted to reimburse the railways for revenue lost because of that freeze. When the freeze was lifted, only about \$6 million of this money had been used. So I suggest to the minister that he could use the remaining \$6 million as a start to develop some programs of special assistance.

The minister could also call on his colleague, the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand), to provide funds and assist shippers to build up the infrastructure he is always talking about; that is to say, he could ask his colleague to assist shippers in their transportation costs as a means of promoting the over-all economic development of the region. I should like the minister to think seriously about those suggestions and to give serious consideration to announcing his program of special assistance as soon as possible.

I had the pleasure, Mr. Speaker, of being with the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications in February, 1969, when it went on its trip to the Atlantic area, and I heard the many fine briefs which were presented at that time. The Maritime Transportation Commission produced figures to show that prohibitive freight rates had destroyed much of our former industry and had discouraged potential industry from setting up in the area. The Maritime Provinces Board of Trade, in

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their excellent brief emphasized that the kind of special transportation they were asking for was not at all unprecedented in Canada. For example, they pointed out the vast St. Lawrence Seaway which operates at a deficit, the fleet of federal icebreakers being used to keep the St. Lawrence open in winter for shipping, at public expense, and the fact that export rates on western grain had been perpetuated at 1897 levels. We note that this type of assistance has been granted to western Canada, and I submit that the Maritimes are entitled to be treated as well as other areas of Canada.

A key point in this brief was that the Atlantic provinces have as much right under confederation to have economic access to the central Canadian market as French Canada has in its claim for a bilingual and bicultural society. In other words, if the central government is committed to spending many millions, or possibly billions of dollars on language facilities and constitutional changes in an effort to hold Canada together, are not we in the Atlantic provinces entitled to financial assistance to develop our industries and to help us remain in confederation? Does Canada stop at the Quebec-New Brunswick border, or is anyone interested in keeping the Atlantic provinces as part of Canada?

I hope that these remarks will do something to convince the government that we in the Atlantic provinces are not simply seeking federal hand-outs. We seek recognition of the many regional problems which have been created by federal government policies, and we seek action which will correct these problems. In other words, the people of the Atlantic provinces who have the basic rights defined in the Maritime Provinces Board of Trade brief are at long last demanding simple justice.

[Translation]

**Mr. Guy LeBlanc (Rimouski):** Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for this opportunity to express my opinion on the matter now before the House.

May I commend the hon. member for Moncton (Mr. Thomas) for introducing this motion which is of particular interest to me, as member for Rimouski, inasmuch as the region of the lower St. Lawrence, including the Gaspé peninsula, has much in common with the Atlantic provinces.

• (4:20 p.m.)

The mover is asking the government to declare a transportation policy for the Atlantic region based upon modern solutions to present and future problems. He also states that the government should:

—introduce, in this session, legislation to implement that policy.

Although I agree with what the mover said, I understand that in the Maritimes, the question of the improvement of the transportation system by road, rail, sea and air must receive special attention from both the federal and provincial governments.

We have the same problem at home in the lower St. Lawrence and Gaspé area where we try, by making all the representations possible at all levels, to get the provincial government, with the help of the federal govern-