

Dollar Items

which is only worthy of a \$1 item in the supplementary estimates, will only be worth \$1 to the people of Canada.

The minister's version of revitalizing rail passenger services was reflected in an announcement from the Canadian Transport Commission abolishing a number of passenger train routes and reducing a number of others. The Minister of Transport calls that a revitalizing of the rail passenger transportation service. I agree in terms of what the minister had to say about the Official Opposition running on both sides of the street with regard to the St. Lawrence Seaway. There is nothing new about that. They have been doing that for years.

Mr. Baldwin: You are not even on the street.

Mr. Benjamin: But I want to remind the Minister of Transport that he and his party are running on both sides of the street. While he is yelling about the user pay concept, and trying to destroy the statutory grain rates, he does not have the courage to face the public and say, "We want to make you pay all of that". He is going to salvage his political neck by saying something that he has said many times, "Maybe the farmer should get that in some other way". It might be a \$1 item in the next supplementary estimates.

How the Minister of Transport, who is in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board, can send out a cheque to every farmer to cover what is the cost which the nation pays for handling grain, I do not know. That would be great, especially before an election. It may be administratively stupid and totally inefficient, it may be the worst kind of political chicanery, but that will not matter to the minister nor to the Liberal party. They will try to have it both ways, just as they are accusing the Official Opposition of having it both ways, and yet they have been doing that and, I predict, they will continue to do it.

Let us look at the arrogance of the minister in putting forward \$1 items in the supplementary estimates. His treatment of parliament is exemplified in a memorandum which came out from his department. You will recall that the minister tried to sneak into the government restraint bill the abolition of "at and east" freight rates which are meaningful to the Georgian Bay area, the ports of Halifax and Saint John. He was clobbered about that by the millers, the grain producers, and the port authorities, and he was clobbered by the three opposition parties as well as by his own colleagues. The government House leader announced the withdrawal of that clause. The Minister of Transport not only has a short attention span, he is a slow learner. A brick wall has to fall on him before he learns. I will be darned if he does not have the gall to bring in another bill to achieve the same purpose. That bill is not likely to be called, and if it is called, he will have a problem.

The minister has sent out a memorandum to all members of parliament and Senators about the Seaway tolls, and on page 7 of that memorandum, dated March 2, we find the following statement. I wish the minister would let people in his own department know what is happening in parliament. It reads:

However, with the recent elimination of this subsidy—

[Mr. Benjamin.]

Meaning the "at and east" freight rates subsidy.

● (2040)

—this combination has become uneconomical and as a result, direct rail movement to Saint-John Halifax is being considered as an alternative.

According to the minister's department, on March 2 the "at and east" rates had already been abolished. But the government had to withdraw that little item out of the restraint bill. The government has not even called the second bill the minister brought in, but his department sent a memorandum to all of us stating that that subsidy has already been eliminated. If that is not some kind of arrogance as well as insensitivity, rudeness, and a derogation from parliament, I do not know what is.

Let us look a little further into the matter of the Seaway. Apparently the Ministry of Transport does not believe members of parliament have any say in what is and what is not the law. The minister and his officials make the law outside parliament. The supply bill will provide funds for the operation of many public services in Canada for the year ending March 31, 1977. Vote L116d authorizes the minister from time to time to fix the amount which shall be paid by the Seaway authority annually out of its toll revenue as a return on capital. Surely that kind of authorization is out of place in the estimates.

Doubling the St. Lawrence Seaway tolls surely is not a small, common, or ongoing item, but to the minister it is only worth one dollar in the supplementary estimates. Obviously there should have been and must be some debate on those kinds of matters. They are matters of significance. Surely there should at least be a statement on motions, but preferably there should be legislation or amendments to existing legislation.

The users of the St. Lawrence Seaway should not have to carry the burden of capital costs. We agree that the transfer of the debt and the interest owing on it, to the public debt is a proper thing to do, but we oppose the provision which gives the Minister of Transport the right from time to time to fix the amount which will be paid as a return on capital. That in itself is worthy of some debate in this chamber. We insist that something like the St. Lawrence Seaway is a public work for the public good of the whole nation. It is not there to make a return on its investment. It is not there to provide a profit for anyone.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): Not even the Canadian people?

Mr. Benjamin: It is there for the benefit of the people as a whole. The nation does not expect a profit from a public work which is for the public good, for the good of the nation as a whole.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): Who says?

Mr. Benjamin: I remind the hon. yahoo across the way, who does not get to his feet when he speaks—