

to bring into industries the input required to maintain their viability.

Mr. Maurice Harquail (Restigouche): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to enter into the debate this evening on the motion before the House, particularly as it relates to the Atlantic provinces. At the outset I might say that all too often we have considered an opposition motion which is so negative in nature that insufficient interest is shown by the opposition party to the extent that the mover of the motion, who in this case happens to represent a constituency in the Atlantic provinces, does not even remain in the House. Evidently this motion is deemed by the hon. member to be insufficiently serious enough for him to be in the House this evening. As a matter of fact, as I tally up the number of members opposite, there are something like six members—

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Watch out; there may not be a quorum!

Mr. Harquail: —of the loyal opposition in attendance this evening. I feel this is a sad observation to make on this parliament. If I may quote the motion before the House, it is:

That in the opinion of this House the government's transportation policies have failed to encourage the growth of strong regional economies, and, in particular, this House condemns the Minister of Transport's Atlantic provinces transportation policy and continues to reject his attitude towards western transportation problems.

How can maritime members, be they supporters of the government or the opposition, turn their backs on the \$125 million worth of programs recently announced by the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang), which are a positive step to assist in alleviating some of the dire transportation problems facing that region today? In terms of rationalization of transportation and alleviating transportation problems, it is beyond my comprehension how so little interest is displayed.

All the rhetoric I have listened to in recent days raises a grave question in my mind as to whether we really have an official opposition daily in attendance in this House.

Mr. Patterson: We do not often have the government in attendance either.

Mr. Harquail: In view of the way that the House leader of the official opposition spoke today, I am seriously wondering just where the opposition is in the House. Of course with the type of leadership which they have to follow, whether it be the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe (Mr. Wagner), or the hon. member for Rocky Mountain (Mr. Clark), or wherever it is he is from, there is no doubt hon. members opposite have a problem, but I am really distressed to see this situation develop at this point in Canadian history.

I should like to return to a more positive note—

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): You could not if you tried.

Mr. Harquail: —and reiterate what the minister has done on behalf of the Atlantic area. He has sat down in a very sincere and serious way with the council of maritime premiers,

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including the representative of the Newfoundland government, Mr. Morgan, and after many hours of debate and deliberation has arrived at a decision to provide in the order of \$300 million worth of subsidies for transportation paid in the maritimes in 1976, whether it be rail transportation, air transportation, or what have you.

In addition, he has discussed freight rates and assistance to provincial ferries in the Atlantic provinces. I submit that he has made a positive contribution on behalf of a government which looks into the heart of a problem and comes up with a solution. In this way the government has assisted the Atlantic provinces to overcome their most serious transportation problems.

● (2130)

When I consider that the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall), who is a maritimer and is supposed to know and understand the problems of Atlantic Canada and who is called the official critic on transportation for the official opposition, would have the mitigated gall—

Mr. Benjamin: Unmitigated gall.

Mr. Harquail: —my friend, who is a member representing one of the western provinces, who has just interjected, as a matter of fact travelled with the transport committee to the Atlantic provinces this past week. I might inform members of the House that in spite of all that might be said about citizens of the Atlantic regions in this country, whether they be members of parliament or elected representatives at the municipal or provincial level, and despite all criticisms that have been expressed by people in the maritimes about not being heard, about being a voice crying in the wilderness, about not being able to bring their points of view forward—and this might be ironical or amusing—in the past week meetings have been held in St. Andrews, New Brunswick, and the CTC has conducted hearings with respect to the rail-passenger service in the maritime provinces. On top of that the government has carried out in good faith its undertaking made some time last year to visit the western provinces, particularly the port and harbour facilities in Vancouver, and we also made good our commitment to visit the east coast.

Indeed it is history now that the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications has just completed an in depth visit to St. John's, Newfoundland; Saint John, New Brunswick, and Halifax when the citizens of that area were given every opportunity to appear and make their voices, opinions and interventions heard before the standing committee on the question of transportation policies, transportation facilities and subsidies, as well as on any other question they might deem appropriate to bring before the committee. Indeed it was a most interesting and enlightening exercise in which I had the honor of participating as a member of the committee.

Mr. Benjamin: Tell them how they kicked Ottawa around.

Mr. Harquail: The fact of the matter is that, discouraging as it was to hear some of the witnesses who appeared before us