

Transportation Policies

was in the Atlantic provinces last week, we were told that this was to the detriment of the port of Saint John or anywhere else in the Atlantic provinces. I was hoping that the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall) would have mentioned that in his remarks earlier this afternoon. No doubt some of his colleagues will speak late this evening to expand on that.

I want to repeat my contention which I have held over a number of years, particularly since the Minister of Transport was appointed after having been minister of justice and also in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board, that in every year since those desperate days every move he has made was designed to put the users of transportation in this country in a position where they were no better off and, more likely, worse off than they had been. His proposals for changes in the Transportation Act return us to the 1890's. I have heard little objection to that from the official opposition who also believe in competition, commercial viability and profitability in transportation, even though governments of different political stripes from the extreme left to the extreme right, and of every stripe in between, in at least two dozen other countries in the world have thrown out those concepts two or three decades ago.

Our country must recognize our geography and our climate and provide a system of equalized or subsidized freight rates. It must make a deliberate decision that people and goods will move in the most efficient way, whether it be on the short haul, medium haul, or long haul.

The Atlantic Provinces Truckers' Association confirmed what I have long believed, namely, that the hauling of bulk heavy commodities for anything over 200 miles was wasteful and inefficient. The railroads admit that they cannot do a better job with heavy bulk commodities because they cannot bear the capital costs of our rights of way, trackage and roadbed and recover the costs from the users. There is nothing new about that. The fact of the matter is that every mode of transportation since before Confederation has been subsidized and has required investment from the public purse at the municipal, provincial and federal level. It has always been thus.

If we are not prepared to return to the toll roads of the early 1800's or late 1700's, to return to a system where only the rich can travel or only those who can afford the cost of moving goods and services can be in business, then surely the government and the minister must get away from the nineteenth century concepts on which they are trying to operate. In fact some members of the official opposition have faced up to this. Some remarks of their spokesmen today who quoted Transport 2,000 and the submission made to the Committee on Transport and Communications in the Atlantic provinces in recent weeks indicate that there might be some members in the official opposition who are prepared to forget about commercial viability and profitability in transportation.

The hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East spoke about the four Atlantic premiers being sucked in, and he did not like that phrase. I called it a con job. The four Atlantic premiers were either conned or they gave away the store in giving up

some statutory rate provisions in the Maritime Freight Rates Act or the Atlantic Region Freight Assistance Act in order to get \$100 million for roads and \$25 million for airports. That flies in the face of energy conservation, of the most economical and efficient use of transportation. They were conned rather than sucked in. I find it passing strange how anxious those four Atlantic premiers or their representatives were to accept this package from the Minister of Transport.

I submit that the people in the Atlantic provinces have been betrayed again. A benefit they had had for many years they gave away, for what? There is some kind of biblical phrase that perhaps the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) knows better, which refers to a mess of pottage. That would apply to these statutory rate provisions which the maritime premiers gave up. Now it lies in the hands of the Minister of Transport to select the commodities which might or might not receive the benefits that they would otherwise receive under the statutory provisions regarding freight transportation.

The Minister of Transport, in collusion with two Liberal and two Tory premiers in eastern Canada, has betrayed the people again, and will continue the discrimination against people and products because of where they happen to live or be located. There will be no change. When you put \$100 million into some more highways in the Atlantic provinces, which are relatively short compared to those in northern Ontario and western Canada, you will increase the use of energy and the cost of transportation, most of which will be borne by the provincial and municipal governments. That is why I say that if the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East thinks he has been sucked in—I chose the word conned—the fact is that the Atlantic premiers gave away the store. They have been party to a perpetuation of a transportation system operated on principles that have been shown to be not some socialist dogma but that have been shown to be inadequate, insufficient, and incorrect in dozens of other countries.

The minister is accused in a recent publication—which I will not refer to because I might be out of order—as a man who has never admitted he was wrong on anything. I do not know if he would ever admit he is wrong on the time of day even if his watch were out. It is time the Minister of Transport just once admitted that commercial viability and competition in the major modes of transportation not only do not work but also perpetuate discrimination against people in the Atlantic region, on the prairies, and in the far north. There is no way a federal government or any province can justify, for example, a dozen eggs costing \$4 on an Arctic island. That is unfair and unjust. It is unfair that it costs \$1.80 for two quarts of milk in Yellowknife. Surely on essential things which everyone has to have—

● (2020)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. gentleman, but his allotted time has expired. Nevertheless, he may continue if there is unanimous consent.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.