

*Transportation Policy*

represent a combination of equalization and/or subsidization. We should not be worried about competition and profitability. Service is the priority and the other two things are secondary. Canada and the United States are the last two countries in the world which still cling to the 1890 concept of competition and viability in respect of transportation.

The one thing I am happy about in the minister's statement is that he and the government accept full responsibility for transportation policy. If we are to have a railroad baron in this country, I would rather it be the Minister of Transport and the government who are answerable to parliament and the country. But why does the minister just go a little way and then no further? This was his big opportunity. This is why I asked earlier if this was a hesitation waltz, a swan-song or both. This was the minister's opportunity following the build-up in expectation in respect of transportation. We were finally going to get that fundamental change in direction and purpose in transportation in this country. All we got was a rehash.

Transportation in this country will require the investment of several billion dollars over the next five to ten years because we have had competition enshrined in our transportation policy. Our railroads and our airlines, both public and private, have never used the full weight of their ability to raise capital in order to improve their transportation systems, which is the business they are in. There is no direction in this regard in the statement today by the minister.

If Canadian Pacific has the capability of raising \$1 billion a year in capital, there is nothing in this statement which says the minister can tell Canadian Pacific it is not going to put \$400 million per year into shopping centres and high-rise office buildings but, rather, is going to put it into transportation. There is nothing in here that says the minister can require that, which is a polite way of saying it is compulsory on the railroads to update, modernize and bring back the standard of transportation they have allowed to deteriorate to the point where today there are between 4,000 and 5,000 miles of track west of Thunder Bay alone in a condition that is a national disgrace.

The minister talks about competition and commercial viability. That is what we had in 1967. The ghost of Pickersgill is still in this room. The minister and this government had the chance, but they blew it. No wonder there was only mild disapproval from the official opposition. I am sure members of that party are breathing much easier today. The policies they supported in 1967 involving competition and commercial viability are still enshrined in the national transportation policy of this government. Those members were not one bit unhappy about that; at least, I did not hear anything from their spokesman which would indicate to the contrary. Of course, he did not talk for very long.

**An hon. Member:** You weren't in the House to listen.

**Mr. Benjamin:** I listened to the hon. gentleman, and he ran out of gas because he agrees with what the minister is doing. There was little discomfort to the official opposition in this statement. I submit, on behalf of the NDP, that new direction in transportation is not all that radical and not all that socialistic. I point out that it is not even

communistic, for the benefit of some of our paranoid friends who look under the bed at night to see if there is a communist there. This concept is that transportation is an essential public service, to be operated as a public utility and treated in that fashion. Even if some parts are privately owned, transportation is still a public utility.

● (1640)

Competition and profitability have no place in a public utility. In the last 50 years there has been no rationale in respect of these principles in relation to a transportation policy. If one goes to other countries, whether they are capitalistic, right-wing, left-wing, or whatever political stripe, anywhere in the world one will find that those concepts were thrown out years ago. The government hangs on to outmoded ideologies and methods. These systems must in the main be publicly owned and controlled. I refer to our major modes of transportation such as rail, air, pipelines and shipping. I think the major part of the bus and truck industry could remain in private hands, but it would have to be a necessary and worth-while adjunct of a publicly owned and controlled transportation utility: it must meet and serve the needs at the local and regional levels.

I want to say to the minister that when he talks about public transportation, whether it involves people or goods, service must come first; it must take priority over commercial viability; it must take priority over so-called competition, just as in the case of other areas involving public utilities. Whether the operation is carried out on a break-even basis, at profit or at a loss, the well-being of the nation as a whole must come first.

The minister spoke about modernizing the grain handling system. That is a statement which really scares me, because we have heard it from a number of people, including the minister in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board. Many rural people in Saskatchewan and Alberta spoke up a week or so ago about that modernizing of our grain handling system. For lack of any other specific proposal or commitment from the minister, I can only conclude—I hope I am wrong—that that phrase “modernizing the grain handling system” carries with it the loss of thousands of miles of railway lines in western Canada and the implication of some bitter experiences with development of inland terminals.

One of the departmental officials who briefed us this morning spoke about the cleaning of grain in western Canada. If that is not a function of the inland terminal, then I do not know what is. The only way to have a viable inland terminal is by giving up a few thousand miles of railway branch lines, because an inland terminal is the only kind that can do any volume of grain cleaning. I can only conclude that the so-called transportation policy announcement today includes a commitment on the part of the government to agree with the railways and the private grain trade that many hundreds of miles of railway lines in the prairie provinces should be abandoned.

The minister in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board says that no branch lines will be abandoned so long as the farmers want to use them. Then what does the government proceed to do, with the supine acquiescence of the Minister of Transport? With alternate delivery points,