

*Supply—Transport*

the railway passenger business for the next 25 years in Canada.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** I did not believe I would ever see the miracle we have just witnessed of the hon. member for Timiskaming and the Leader of the Opposition both asking me to give leadership to this country. The shock is almost more than I can bear. I think I will probably have quite a lot of time to do this, although the hon. member for Timiskaming seems to be rather better informed about my future than I am myself.

**Mr. Peters:** I only know what I read in the newspapers.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** The hon. gentleman ought to know, if he has read newspapers for as long as I have, that he should take a lot of these gossipy stories with several grains of salt. For example, I have been reading a lot about my ill health. I told the Leader of the Opposition, when he asked me about my health on New Year's Day, that I thought my ill health was in part in the minds of some people who would really like to see me out of my present position.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, no.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** I felt very much tempted to say that I have never felt better in my life, but I knew that phrase was copyright. If, in fact, I am going to stay in this portfolio until the railway legislation is passed, as well as several other pieces of legislation to which the hon. gentleman referred, and if the pace is going to be the same leisurely pace that we have witnessed for the last two weeks in parliament, I believe I am quite safe in this portfolio, provided I am spared, as Mackenzie King would have said, until at least 1971 or 1972. At the rate we are going I do not believe we will get more than one or two bills passed before Christmas.

**An hon. Member:** You are an optimist.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** Here we are on the first item of the estimates of the department after five days of discussion, all of it spent on the first item.

**Mr. Starr:** Would the minister permit a question at this point?

**Mr. Pickersgill:** Oh, sure.

**Mr. Starr:** Does the minister not think that if he had not made 34 or 35 speeches during consideration of the estimates we might have completed them by now?

**Mr. Pickersgill:** Well, I do not know, because the hon. member for Saint John-Albert said that if I had made an hour long speech at the beginning we would have completed these estimates long ago. The house leader on that side now says if I had not made so many speeches we would have been through. I do not believe it would have made any difference whatever.

**Mr. Peters:** Would the minister permit another question?

**Mr. Pickersgill:** Surely.

**Mr. Peters:** Does the minister not agree that if a national transportation policy, which we are told is now prepared, had been presented to the house, the discussion of transportation problems that has taken place probably would have been redundant?

**Mr. Pickersgill:** No, I feel quite sure that if I had made a speech on national transportation policy, no matter how reasonable or how sensible, there would have been at least twice as many speeches as there have been during this debate. I do not believe one would have to go to the other side of the house to get to that position. It just so happens that in a country like ours, we have been discussing national transportation policy since the days of the Charlottetown and Quebec conferences, over 100 years ago now. I said once, rather lightheartedly, that people talk about bilingualism and biculturalism, but if one really wanted to arouse the passions of Canadians all he had to do was mention railways. I think that long before we agree on a national transportation policy every little Canadian will be born speaking both English and French.

I am regretfully, therefore, not the least optimistic about evolving an agreed national transportation policy—it sounds much nicer to call it “national”. I have listened to the speeches most hon. members have made, and there has not been much demand for a national policy. There have been one of two speeches that were not regional, but there have been any number that were just—I may say I am a terrible parish pump politician myself—

**An hon. Member:** Like the one now.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** Exactly; I am a terrible parish pump politician myself, and so are most of us. Most of the speeches have been parochial. If we are really honest, I do not believe many of us are more concerned with national transportation in the country than