

Transportation

provisions in this bill cannot be passed on to someone else.

Transportation needs in this country have changed during the last several years, since the MacPherson commission was set up and since it presented its report, and this is particularly true of western Canada. Many of the rail lines which were designated by the companies as nominees for abandonment have proven to be worth while, and I am sure that the railway companies would hesitate at this time to proceed with these abandonment plans.

The great change that has taken place is only the forerunner of the change which will take place in the next few years. That is particularly true of the province of Saskatchewan, where there have been new developments in the production of minerals of one kind and another.

● (9:00 p.m.)

We cannot help but view this legislation not only with an eye on the effect it will have on our industry today but on the effect it might have on the industry we hope to have tomorrow. The title of the bill is, "An act to define and implement a national transportation policy for Canada", and no one will quarrel with that, "to amend the Railway Act and other acts in consequence thereof"—this will depend upon the amendments that are brought forward—"and to enact other consequential provisions." Knowing the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pickersgill), whose "other consequential provisions" are what bother me, because if they are not spelled out so that it is very clear for everyone to see, we in western Canada and on the prairies cannot help viewing with some concern a measure as vague as this.

The bill contains a clause referring to the Crowsnest pass rates and the minister has given us the assurance that these rates will be protected for western Canada. As I read the new sections 328 and 329, whether the minister really means what he said in this regard is a debatable question. I cannot help but remind him, as I suppose he has been reminded before in this debate and on other occasions also, that the Crowsnest pass rates are looked upon in western Canada as part of the Magna Carta of confederation, and we do not want to see written into any statute of this parliament legislation that will place these rates in a position where they can be eroded two, three, five or ten years from now when someone may come along and say that the basis of the rates has been changed and

such-and-such action will be taken. I know there are those in the maritimes who look upon the Maritime Freight Rates Act in much the same way.

Looking at this bill and the explanations the minister has offered in regard to it, I should like to make the following comments. The minister referred to the subsidies which the royal commission recommended. They are three in number. I need not rehash them for the benefit of members of the house. The explanation goes on in this way:

The present bill takes into account many representations received in regard to these matters. In place of the three special subsidy funds, it provides for a transitional subsidy to the railways which will start at approximately the present level of railway subsidy payments, namely, \$110 million per year; and commencing in 1968 will decline at the rate of 12½ per cent of the present subsidy each year.

It does not say when this decline is going to end.

Mr. Pickersgill: It is a simple matter of short division, Mr. Speaker. It is eight years.

Mr. Nasserden: That is what worries us in western Canada and the prairies at the present time, because this freedom the minister seems so anxious to give to the railways can mean only one thing in dollars and cents for us, and that is increased costs for those of us in the part of the country which is so dependant upon agriculture for a livelihood. We are what I would call a captive industry because we have to speculate on a government in power at the present time that does not seem to do anything about the prices farmers receive for their products, at a time when farm costs are rising as they have never risen before.

This is a government that promised the farmers of western Canada that they would do something about the price of grain, not only wheat but other grains; yet on every occasion when the opportunity to do something in this regard has presented itself, they have failed utterly to do anything. We have seen the minister and some of his colleagues laugh this off as an election promise. This is one of the reasons we would like to see written into this legislation assurances that will be more than the fact that in eight years time the costs that go into producing the products of the farms in western Canada will have been increased by more than \$110 million a year. This of course applies right across Canada.