

*Adjournment Debate*

I can understand the ignorance of the Minister of Transport concerning the geographic and population characteristics of the area, but that the Premier of Nova Scotia should agree, in exchange for what amounts to a mess of potage, that the Cape Breton area should be directly cut off from the one proposed transcontinental route agreed on is, to my mind, incredible. Indeed, it is preposterous.

My question implied that the minister in releasing the documents, principally the study paper which had been prepared by the governments jointly under the auspices of the joint transportation committee, was prejudging the hearings of the transport committee on passenger transportation then taking place in various maritime locations.

It was the timing of this release which led me and many others to the conclusion that the minister was either prejudging the issue or was holding a gun to the heads of the commissioners who were conducting the hearings. Intentionally or otherwise, the minister cast grave doubts on the legitimacy of those hearings and accused the whole commission process of being mere window dressing for a government policy which had already been decided upon.

By emphasizing in the study paper that the federal government was prepared to contribute a subsidy amounting to 100 per cent if there was only one transcontinental train running from Halifax to the Montreal area rather than contribute the 80 per cent it does now, the minister appeared to me and to many others to be imposing his wishes on the commissioners' conclusions. To say the least, it appeared to be an unwarranted intervention at a crucial time in the hearings and in the regulatory process which was going on in the maritimes to determine the future of passenger rail service.

● (1820)

In answering my question, the minister referred to the very extensive \$125 million transportation package for the Atlantic provinces "as evidence of our intention to use money more effectively for the Atlantic provinces". Well, there are a lot of people in the Atlantic provinces who do not agree that a \$125 million transportation package over three years for the whole of the maritime provinces is a very extensive one. In fact, the Nova Scotia highways minister was quoted in the *Chronicle-Herald* for Thursday, June 2 as saying that the proposal which the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) put before the Canadian Transport Commissioners does not resemble the plan put before the minister by the provinces at meetings earlier this year.

The Minister of Transport, of course, is concerned with defraying rail passenger expenses across the nation by \$112 million and sees the solution as cutting out rail passenger transportation. Since we are in an energy-intensive era, it strikes one as being ironic that the minister is not more concerned at having to pay the \$250 million annual deficits on the operation of airports such as Mirabel. I would think that due consideration to the type of energy crunch facing this nation in the next decade should make us emphasize energy resource conservation, particularly in transportation facilities,

[Mr. Hogan.]

both public and private. Given the dependence of Nova Scotia on imported oil, this is more true for it than all of the rest of the provinces except Prince Edward Island.

As regards my supplementary question in which I noted that, in the *quid pro quo* of \$125 million over a three-year period for less railway passenger transportation in the Atlantic region, there is no mention made of improving equipment and facilities such as passenger trains, locomotives, railbeds and so on, I suggested, under my understanding of the agreement, that the Atlantic provinces, especially the two which depend upon railroads—Nova Scotia and New Brunswick—would be retaining in the railroad passenger industry the technology of the 1940s and 1950s, while other provinces across the country are opting for increased, more efficient rail passenger transit systems.

In answering me, the minister seemed to agree with this assessment, although he made the general statement "We believe that the upgrading of passenger services is essential", and related it to the change in the subsidy under his proposal. But this does not constitute any commitment to the modernization of equipment, railbeds, trackage, etc. that is needed.

It is obvious that the minister is determined to cut back on railway passenger transportation in the maritime provinces. I say "maritimes" because Newfoundland no longer has a railway system and Prince Edward Island does not have one either. I read the Canadian National submission to the Canadian Transport Commission at a hearing in Halifax on May 17, 1977. Mr. Garth Campbell, the Canadian National vice-president of passenger marketing, said in that submission, and I quote:

It would be a mistake to expect rail services to continue simply by halving or quartering what is offered.

Mr. Campbell seems to agree with my contention as against the minister's, because in the Canadian National brief he emphasizes that if governments decide to emphasize highway and air services, railway systems will receive limited capital or none at all. He noted that the existing passenger cars in the maritime regions are 25 years old and one car used at Halifax is 40 years old.

In his memorandum of May 25, the Minister of Transport has a table on page 3 showing annual passengers by volume and percentage, using the four modes of transportation—rail, bus, air and auto. In incorporating this table to make his case look stronger, the Minister of Transport failed to use statistics that would show, as Mr. Campbell noted in the CNR brief, that traffic has begun to pick up again, as far as passenger trains are concerned, in the last two years after a period of steady decline since 1971.

In a brief to the Canadian Transport Commission in Sydney on May 27, I made some suggestions on how improvements in railroad transportation in the long run could indeed help the Sydney steel plant, the Pictou county Trenton Car Works and, indirectly, the port of Halifax; but I do not have the time here to repeat my arguments.