

Transportation Policies

about the goal which, as many of us will recall, has been before the House for a number of years. I quote:

To bring about a greater balance in the distribution of people and in the creation and distribution of wealth between and within the regions of this country.

Mr. Speaker, those words were extracted from the primary study upon which the government has for the past four or five years based its transport policy in the various regions. I suggest to you with all the force I can command that the interpretation of policy in this field by the minister and by the government is having a diametrically opposite effect. Government transportation policies, or the lack of them, are seriously hindering efforts to reduce regional economic disparities. Moreover, the feeling of isolation which often exists away from major urban centres in this country is resulting in increased strains upon national unity.

The other day, in Halifax, I felt constrained to say to the transport committee that it had not come to the maritimes to examine the master transportation system alone, but was there testing national unity. My comments this afternoon centre on that statement. It is not only what is going on in the province of Quebec that is testing national unity; it is time we took account of the fact that there are other problems such as economic problems and regional disparity which are testing the national unity of this country. The thrust of my comments is a direct charge which I lay with deep regret against the present minister. Perhaps his former parliamentary secretary would sit down and allow the minister to listen to me; I am sure the people of Atlantic Canada would appreciate it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Forrestall: This minister told us, back at the last conference with maritime premiers and the Newfoundland minister responsible for transportation, that we were wasting money on transportation in Atlantic Canada. He said, in the coziness of Prince Edward Island, something like this, and I want to quote from a communique issued after a meeting of the Council of Maritime Premiers in Charlottetown, P.E.I., on February 7 and 8, 1977: I quote from page 2 of this release, near the end of the section on transportation:

Mr. Lang, Mr. Morgan and the maritime premiers agreed in principle that improved passenger transportation could best be achieved by providing special assistance for upgrading bus and air services in the region, to be followed by changes to existing rail passenger services.

I will end the quotation there. It has not been taken out of context. That happened in February. About two weeks ago the transport committee, after much fanfare, showed up in Atlantic Canada to hear from the residents of the region about passenger transportation services there. The hearings were begun on a Monday in Halifax. Mr. Speaker, on the Thursday preceding the opening of those hearings, the minister—it was probably not the Minister of Transport; it is probable there was a joint release—told me in response to questions in the House that the report which I have in my hand represents the collective views of himself, his departmental advisers, the Council of Maritime Premiers and the Premier of Newfoundland through the respective transportation ministers or their representatives.

An hon. Member: That is right.

Mr. Forrestall: The province of Nova Scotia, at least, released to the general public the contents of a study entitled "Atlantic Region Intermodal Passenger Study—Final Report", dated March, 1977. It is interesting to note it was released three or four days before the transport committee commenced its hearings in Halifax by the federal-provincial committee on Atlantic region transportation consultants—I should say they are probably insultants—the IBI group in association with ADI Limited, and the Development Planning Association Limited, whoever the devil they are.

That study, Mr. Speaker, finally and irrevocably clarified the position of the minister and the government with respect to the transportation of passengers intraregionally in the maritime provinces and interregionally in Canada. The task of the transport committee was to determine how passengers could best be moved in our part of the country. That was its mandate, to examine the existing modes, including rail, and to report back. My charge is that the government gave to that group, through the Council of Maritime Premiers and Mr. Morgan, or through the so-called federal-provincial committee on Atlantic regional transportation a conclusion which it told them to justify. How can we in Atlantic Canada sit idly by and watch not only the work of the transport committee being thwarted by such action, but also the work of the Royal Commission on Transportation being carried out on behalf of the people of Canada by Dr. Sullivan of Newfoundland? The work of this commission has been prejudged, the work of the railway transport committee on passenger services has been prejudged, and the work of the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications was prejudged before leaving Ottawa to spend last week in the Atlantic region. These were prejudged because the Minister of Transport used his vast command to suck in poor little fellows like us in the Atlantic provinces. That is a disgusting word and I do not like it, but I like even less the fact that I believe I was sucked in by the minister, the government and its advisers. They knew exactly what they wanted and then hired some consultants to ratify it and justify it.

● (1730)

Some of the conclusions supporting the position of the Minister of Transport are so outdated, inadequate, and totally unacceptable that they have already raised the ire and the resentment of hundreds and hundreds of the maritimes. They have also raised the ire of organized groups in the maritimes who say the figures and the data being used are inaccurate.

On May 25, as I indicated earlier, the minister said in response to a planted question from the other side—and we are used to that—that we were going to get something in the order of \$125 million in the Atlantic provinces to straighten out our transportation mess.

An hon. Member: Big deal!

Mr. Forrestall: Big deal is right. No further evidence is required by members of this Chamber on the question of the