

the acceptance of such modification by the federal government is equally an acceptance by that government of the responsibility to ensure that the revised act substantially improves the marketing position of regional industry both now and in the long term.

This is something that the premiers emphasized and that I also would like to emphasize.

Fourth and last, I do not see any specified amount of funds provided by the bill to pay subsidies. I should like to know whether there is any limitation on the amount. Subclause 2 of clause 3 of the bill makes reference to a ceiling on assistance payable of 30 per cent of the charges for movement of goods by any individual carrier, but I should like to know whether the total amount of funds available by way of subsidy is limited. Perhaps the minister would clarify that point later.

Briefly, those are the points I wanted to make. I welcome this temporary measure and I hope it will be an interim one. I ask the minister to give full consideration to the committee's report. Many of the suggestions should and must be adopted right away if we are to develop a viable Atlantic transportation act. We suggest that subsidies are very important to the maritimes, and we suggest they be granted on a selective basis and administered in such a way as to encourage industries to develop into viable enterprises. I hope the minister will consider these remarks as well as the report of the committee, and that in the near future we can expect an over-all transportation policy for the maritimes.

Mr. Thomas S. Barnett (Comox-Alberni): Mr. Speaker, I think the normal reaction of hon. members would be that we are in a rather strange position procedurally at the moment in being asked to deal with the second reading of this bill on the eve of receiving and discussing a comprehensive report made by a parliament standing committee which it has been indicated will be placed before the house later today. One's normal reaction is that this is a pretty bad case of putting the cart before the horse. However, inasmuch as there seems to be some indication of agreement to this course of action on the part of members of the transport committee, who recently made a rather extensive tour of the Atlantic region, perhaps other hon. members will go along with this proposal on the understanding given them by the minister that this bill represents an interim and perhaps temporary measure.

Atlantic Regional Freight Assistance Act

There are one or two aspects of the bill about which I am concerned, particularly with reference to the extension of subsidies to truckers. I hope the minister and the government are not going to go overboard in this respect. I have sensed a disposition on the part of truckers in the various representations they have made to the members of this house over quite a period of years to feel that they have some sort of divine right to equality of position with the railways in regard to matters such as this and in relation to transportation generally. My concern is that if this matter is not watched very carefully we are going to find ourselves, in effect, in the position of paying a double subsidy. In other words, we are going to be subsidizing truckers, even though the result of their operations will be to reduce the volume of traffic provided to the railways. Therefore we will find ourselves in the position of subsidizing two uneconomic operations.

I think this discussion stems from the debate in the house at the time the National Transportation Act was under consideration. In my view that act was a rather peculiar one. It set a precedent that I am not sure is at all desirable in that when it was introduced it contained a kind of preamble. Actually it was not a preamble but a clause of the bill which in effect set forth a particular philosophy of approach to transportation matters.

I am concerned that in the follow-through from the passage of that act there is going to be a slavish adherence to the principle of supporting the virtues of competition for competition's sake, rather than the recognition that in a matter as basic to the economy as transportation there are situations where the concept of complementing one form of transportation with another is really a more economically sensible approach. In my view the practical effect of slavishly following the concept of the virtues of competition is that we in this country will indulge in a lot of wasteful and uneconomical capital expenditure. I think we have an historic reason to be concerned about this happening. The whole history of the boom of railway construction, competitive railway lines and the resulting chaos that eventually caused parliament to place severe restrictions on the operation of the railways and the construction of new railway lines should, I think, be kept in mind by the parliamentarians of this generation. It has been argued that the wasteful expenditure of capital funds at that time seriously endangered the proper growth and development of Canada as a nation.