

Atlantic Regional Freight Assistance Act

own province, about the possibility of providing assistance in connection with the transportation to the Atlantic provinces of various raw materials which might be the elements necessary to some kind of economic project. At present there is no such help given. If an industry requires to bring in raw materials it must do so on the same basis as does any other shipper. This is something I hope the committee will look at.

I should also like to say a few words having to do, again, with the 12th report of the standing committee. The joint federal-provincial committee is also being asked to look at the position of all modes of transportation. It seems to me there are legitimate complaints with regard to the treatment of certain kinds of shipments carried by what is called "the balloon trade". This covers commodities which have a good deal of bulk but little weight; at present they are being carried by air and by sea. There is authorization for this committee to consider all modes and determine what recommendations should be made with regard to assistance to air freight, sea freight or any other mode which might develop.

I believe I have answered in a general way the representations which have been made to me. The bill is designed to meet an immediate and urgent problem. I recognize that at the moment the truckers are under two impediments. They are under the impediment of the rates on incoming traffic and under the impediment of having to fight the railways on the M.F.R.A. basis. So the rationale of the whole program is to give the Atlantic trucking industry at least a reasonable break in terms of getting its products to market. We want to improve that situation. We have said to the Atlantic provinces: We accept your proposal that you should have a say in the question of other subsidies to be provided. I am giving the house a commitment that there will be no change in the rates under the M.F.R.A. unless the committee so recommends and unless the amount to be spent in some other manner is at least the same as the amount originally provided.

I should add that it is not enough to provide even a measure of equality for all modes of transport unless there is a good roads network. This is fundamental to the government's concept of regional development and expansion and we intend to continue to provide assistance in road building. This is not a matter which comes directly within my responsibility but I am in constant consultation

[Mr. Jamieson.]

with my colleague the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion. Some work is being done this year. A very remarkable amount of work, when one totals it up, has been done over the last six, seven or eight years, including completion of the trans-Canada highway. We have spent many hundreds of millions of dollars on roads in the Atlantic area. No one knows better than I that this is still far from enough, and part of this total transportation package will have to be continued encouragement by the federal government of road construction in the Atlantic region.

• (12 noon)

I would be the first to admit that this measure is by no means the law of the Medes and the Persians, that it is not a perfect piece of legislation. But I do say to hon. members that I have at least sought in prior discussions to take into account the representations that have been made to me by hon. members opposite, by the premiers of the provinces and by the industries concerned. In order to get this measure through and to show at least some progress in this vital field we have moved in the direction we have and brought forward this legislation today. I hope the measure commends itself to the committee, because I am sure that within the next three or four months we will come to see in a very real way the benefits of it.

Mr. Nowlan: Would the minister permit a question? I thank him for his explanation and answers to some of the queries raised on this side of the house. Frankly, if the bill were as plausible as the minister's explanation there would be no doubt in my mind about the intent and/or objective of the legislation.

Just for clarification I should like to pose a question that is in three parts. First of all, we are talking here only of interim subsidy payments and the shifting of those payments from the railways to the truckers on a selective basis. We are not talking about more money being paid under the Maritime Freight Rates Act, if my understanding is correct.

What I cannot understand at the moment, despite the minister's most plausible and constructive explanation, is the suggestion that the saving under the interim payment will be transferred in the form of a financially equivalent payment to an operator of some other mode of transportation or shipper or, to use the words in the bill, to a carrier, shipper or consignee. The difficulty I have with the minister's explanation, though this may be a