

The Address—Mr. Benjamin

build and maintain their own right-of-way. They would then be in an equal fight with the railroads and the airlines. Of course, the taxpayers have already built and maintained the airports for the airlines.

The fact of the matter is that every mode of transportation, going back to the invention of the wheel, has always been subsidized.

We have the situation where governments are hypnotized by user pay to the extent where these cease to be a public utility and become examples to be compared with private enterprise. It would be illogical for private enterprise to buy out the ferry business unless it operated only once a year, otherwise it would go broke.

The same situation is true for airports or highways. They would go broke without applying tolls to recover those costs, plus a reasonable return on their investment. This cannot be done in areas that are properly and logically a public responsibility as a public utility.

The nation has never objected to deficits. I have not heard the voters in an uproar—except editorial writers—about a post office deficit or a deficit on ferry services. These are things which everyone must use directly or indirectly. If it were logical to apply tolls for these services, there should be tolls on pedestrians because they walk up and down the sidewalks for nothing and the ratepayers pay the property taxes to build the sidewalks. Why not have a toll of 25 cents for every six blocks? It would be logical if we are considering tolls as a means to achieving full cost recovery of public utilities for public use.

● (1610)

Mr. Mazankowski: Mr. Speaker, we are not talking about full cost recovery. The Hon. Member has said, yes, there should be selective cost recovery. He said there should not be any tolls on ferry services, notwithstanding the fact that his own NDP government in B.C. did not choose that particular route. I would like to get some idea from the Hon. Member what he considers to be a fair and reasonable cost recovery. As I said in the case of the Canadian air transport administration, in 1980 there was a 58.1 per cent cost recovery. That has now gone down to 34.4 per cent.

Can I ask the Hon. Member whether he considers 58 per cent too high, too low, or just right? Does he consider 34 per cent too high or too low? Or does he consider that it should be less than that or more than that?

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Speaker, I do not think the costs should be any more than they are now. The Minister's additional \$34 million for an air tax is that much more for consumers.

Mr. Mazankowski: On taxpayers. If the consumer is not going to pick it up, the taxpayers will.

Mr. Benjamin: Again, Mr. Speaker, transportation is something we all have to use both directly and indirectly. I repeat my argument. I am sure that if you slapped \$5 a year on every taxpayer in Canada just for that one thing, you would probably have more money left over in the operation of airports.

Mr. Mazankowski: What is the magic figure?

Mr. Benjamin: We used to have no airport tax.

Mr. Epp (Provencher): We used to have no airports.

Mr. Benjamin: Now it is up to over \$23, and it is going to go up to \$30. We used to have no airport tax. In real dollars the deficit was no worse then when there was no airport tax than it is now. What has it accomplished? I suppose it provided some additional money for Ministers of Transport to make some airport improvements. There is no doubt about the fact that that is what they did. However, I would have taken the amount out of general tax revenue and used that money.

Mr. Dick: The deficit.

Mr. Mazankowski: You would let the poor little pensioner pay.

Mr. Benjamin: I would charge a fee to people owning executive jets, to private airline charter companies, and to scheduled airlines. I would charge them a fee. Anybody who rented space in my building or in my house I would charge rent, the same as I would charge people for renting space in an airport. Even now the Minister is trying to drive a Canadian car rental company into bankruptcy with the kinds of regulations and policy he is following. But I am not talking about the latter. If you rent space in the building, of course, you charge for it. But that would not anyway near begin to cover the cost of the operation of a modern airport. I believe that continually raising the user fee is self-defeating.

Mr. Mazankowski: Is 34 per cent too high or too low?

Mr. Benjamin: I would say, leave it where it is, Mr. Speaker. I would say, this far and no further. Leave it at 34 per cent cost recovery. The Minister can get the money. Everybody uses airlines one way or another. The Minister will get the money back some other way which will be more fair and equitable instead of picking on each sector in his Department.

Mr. Mazankowski: You are going to charge the pensioner.

Mr. Benjamin: And the pensioners, Mr. Speaker. The Minister is going to raise the airport tax from \$23 to \$30 for the pensioners. This is fine for those who are rich and can afford to travel. But what do you do when a whole family has to attend the funeral of another family member, or an old age pensioner—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Order, please.