

Air Canada

I do so as a member from western Canada who has fought long and hard for many things in the west, and who has a proud record of achievement in that regard, even with regard to measures which I myself have sought, particularly in the grain area, such as hopper cars, two-price wheat, and the like.

I refer to the quote from the hon. member's correspondent about facilities for other places. I hope the hon. member will tell me that he was not quoting with approval this kind of reference from one region to other regions as though that were a ground for complaint of a separatist nature. I also hope he will tell me that when he replies to the correspondent he will draw his attention to the recent opening of the Calgary airport, at a cost of about \$130 million, and point out that on a per capita basis per province that is a larger investment in that province than the Mirabel airport was in the province of Quebec.

Mr. Roche: The minister has drawn a rather excessive interpretation from the quotation and, I may say, an unfortunate interpretation of my correspondent's letter. He pointed out, very properly, that the commitment, having been given some time ago for structural expansion of the Edmonton airport, it is now delayed because of increased expenses at other airports as a result of inflation because this government has not been able to stop inflation in this country, which is hardly a reasonable policy for the strengthening of confederation which is at the heart of so many questions in the House. I will be responding to my correspondent very fully and indicating to him the response of the minister.

Mr. Max Saltzman (Waterloo-Cambridge): Mr. Speaker, there is a certain plausibility to this bill and to some of the changes that the bill proposes which, I think, obscures the basic irrationality of the bill and why it is very bad legislation going in the wrong direction. Over the years I have seen many ministers of transport, and I think each of them, in his own way, turned out to be a greater failure than his predecessor. It is not that the ministers of transport whom I have known over the years intentionally wanted to be failures, intentionally did not seek to do good, or felt that the kind of things they were doing would give them some kind of immortal gloss in that office which history would remember with gratitude; they get going in the wrong direction, forgetting the fundamental thing about the nature of transportation in a country like Canada. Transportation in Canada is not just another service to be looked at in terms of profitability and efficiency. That is not to say these things are not important, because they are important. What tends to be forgotten, and I regret that it is something the old Tories knew but the new Tories do not seem to know, is that transportation in this country, more so than any other country in the western world, was an instrument of binding and holding the nation together.

● (1622)

We hear talk of doing this, that or the other, lopping off this line, saying this one is not paying, and so on. What that does is tear apart the cement that holds confederation together. Many say it was 100 or 110 years ago that the railroad was promised

[Mr. Lang.]

to British Columbia, that it was a long time ago that the Crowsnest rates were put into place, and we had to subsidize the maritimes in order to bring them in. However, that is an on-going debate. No issue in Canadian history has remained so much to the fore as has the issue of transportation.

I make these remarks in the way of a preamble. I do not do this in a way critical of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang). Some people accuse him of being a rather cold man. I do not think he goes out of his way to change that impression. He is an intelligent man, one who wants to do what is right in his portfolio. I am not saying that what I am going to suggest is necessarily right in all its detail; I am suggesting to the minister that he must get off the kind of track he has been pushed on to by the conservative element in this country.

Mr. Friesen: Small "c".

Mr. Saltzman: Small "c" and big "C". I will be quoting some big "C". It is the great irony of our time that the Liberals, who did so well for a long time in terms of public policies when they were picking up ideas from the NDP, suddenly reversed and are taking them from an area which will not be as productive for this country. I say this with some degree of seriousness, because transportation is important. In the time available to me, I will not be able to discuss fully this subject; however, I want to discuss such matters as competition, monopoly, public ownership, efficiency, profit and those kinds of concepts.

I want to state my basic premise. I have already stated one, that transportation is not just another service; it is the cement of this nation and must be viewed in that light. I will point out later that even the argument about efficiency and profitability does not change that. If we are to have a transportation system that unites this nation, it can only be done by a monopoly; it cannot be done through competition. Competition may be very useful with Mac's Milk stores; however, it is not useful for railroads, aircraft and buses. What this country needs more than anything else in the transportation system is co-ordination, planning and conservation, rather than the wasteful inefficiency of the kind of competitive structure that has grown up.

Whether we are talking about railroads or airlines, competition simply means that the private carriers pick up the profitable end of the deal and the public carriers get the other end of the stick. They are saddled with something called public responsibility. The problem is, it just does not work. There is competition in transportation without this crazy kind of civil war between different modes of transportation. There is international competition as a result of the international carriers. This country is too small for domestic cut-throat competition. At a time when we talk about saving energy, it is ridiculous to have planes flying half empty, and airlines competing with each other to see who can make the most smoke from one end of Canada to the other. I agree that a monopoly will not give everything the people want; there will be some inconvenience.

Someone might say that if we have competition, the stewardesses will be prettier and more polite and we will be able to