

The Address—Mr. Charles H. Thomas

There are many things that could be done to help the Atlantic region, such as new national park development served by good modern highways to stimulate and increase tourism, the bettering of existing and very popular tourist facilities, the provision of a better road, rail and air network generally, not forgetting, of course, such vital links as the Prince Edward Island causeway. But at the heart of the matter lies the problem of producing within the four provinces of the east coast a sound industrial base, capable of regular and natural growth, free, when possible, of subsidy or other public assistance and able to hold its own in the markets of central Canada, North America and the world.

Only by creating such a base can we begin to solve the pressing social problems such as poverty, unemployment, poor health, inadequate educational facilities and a gradually wasting population. In this we must think nationally in terms of turning areas of national liability into sources of national asset. One of the first steps that must be taken in establishing a healthy industrial climate in the Atlantic region, I believe, is to tackle and solve the problem of excessive transportation costs. It would be idle for us to talk of just societies, regional equality and a united nation if this question is not solved. The ruinous cost of transportation is the single greatest cause of Atlantic region backwardness today.

We do not want handouts. We do not want to live on the dole. We want help to be able to help ourselves. All we ask of the rest of Canada is an understanding that our problems are not ours alone but the nation's and that the sooner we can look after ourselves the sooner will all Canadians benefit.

As things now stand, federal government assistance puts a premium on destitution. Their measures, however well-intentioned, have erected unemployment into a way of life for many. No able-bodied person can qualify for relief unless totally unemployed. This leaves a great segment of our population underemployed, working, but earning below a human subsistence level, and completely unassisted. They should be helped. They must be helped. But such help as social welfare in the form of relief payments must be strictly a stopgap emergency measure. What we want is a plan to provide the work that the people of the Atlantic region are willing, able and eager to do. Let me paraphrase the late Sir Winston Churchill by saying "give us the jobs and we'll turn out the tools", and by tools I mean the goods, the services, the abilities and

[Mr. Thomas (Moncton).]

the brains which the Atlantic region is capable of producing in abundance for their own advancement and the advancement of the whole nation.

However, Mr. Speaker, I must come back to what I said before, namely that in our region the key to everything is transportation, complete, efficient, fast and economical transportation by road, by rail, by water and by air. This means only one thing—a new, comprehensive transportation policy.

I was startled the other day in the house to hear the Minister of Transport (Mr. Hellyer), in answer to a question from the hon. member for Cumberland-Colchester North (Mr. Coates), avoid the problem of formulating an adequate transportation policy by saying he was hoping to receive some useful suggestions from the premiers of the Atlantic provinces. Surely the minister has been long enough in office to know that there are more than 80 extensive and thoughtful briefs on file from various municipalities, provinces and other bodies setting out practical suggestions in great detail.

Of course, these briefs were filed last session with the standing committee on transportation and communications. Unfortunately the committee never got around to hearing these briefs on their home ground because they were impeded by the notoriously bad transportation bottlenecks in the Atlantic provinces, stuck in the ice of the Northumberland strait, snowbound on Prince Edward Island, where there is still no all-weather transportation route, and subsequently recalled to Ottawa by the party whips.

I should like to suggest to the minister that this standing committee be immediately reconstituted, that it meet as soon as possible and set up a series of meetings and public hearings on the ground where the chief transportation problems exist, namely, the Atlantic provinces.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Thomas (Moncton): May I quote the following from the Moncton *Times-Transcript* in connection with this suggestion:

It is clear to Atlantic residents—having suffered from transportation shortcomings for years—that there is little hope of any constructive action coming from Ottawa as long as those whose task it is to make the required changes try to do so from the comfort of the Commons chamber.

I agree wholeheartedly with this observation. I believe that what is required is on the