

*National Transportation Act, 1986*

**Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to participate in the debate on this very important Bill, a Bill which does not simply deal with the question of transportation but which, in its implications, goes far beyond merely transportation. The motion currently before the House has been proposed by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin). It suggests that the Bill be withdrawn and that the subject matter thereof be referred to the Standing Committee on Transport. This motion is most important because it recognizes that there has been inadequate consultation by this Government with the parties, groups and individuals most affected by this important decision.

We have already seen other examples of the failure of the Government to consult with groups affected by decisions that touch their lives. Just recently, for example, we saw the debacle in Newfoundland in which the Government moved ahead to announce a new policy but forgot to consult with the people most affected. That kind of arrogance and insensitivity to the concerns of the people of Newfoundland has been mirrored in the approach the Government has taken in transportation. It is for that reason that at this time the Bill should be withdrawn and the Government should recognize that the people of Canada should be given an opportunity to discuss this issue before it goes any further.

*[Translation]*

Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that this Bill is also connected with a program the Government is implementing in another area. I am referring to privatization. Yesterday, the Minister responsible for privatization declared that the Government was very actively considering the case of Air Canada. The Minister told us that she was taking a very close look at the privatization of Petro-Canada as well. Well, I suppose this is the Government's ideology at work in Canada's public sector. However, we in the NDP are not prepared to allow the Government to destroy Air Canada and Petro-Canada and the transportation industry in this country, an industry that is essential in a country like ours.

● (1200)

*[English]*

I mentioned that this is not just a transportation issue. It touches on a broad range of issues. For example, it clearly affects working men and women. Thousands of jobs are at risk as companies will be forced into throat-cutting competition. We need look no further than immediately south of the border to see the implications of this legislation. It will promote union busting and the destruction of jobs. We have just recently seen the elimination of Red Caps on VIA Rail. For many Canadians, particularly the disabled and senior citizens, the Red Caps provided important and essential service. Yet as part of its drive to cut costs VIA Rail has eliminated that vital service. As one who uses the trains on a regular basis, I find that decision not only heartless but absolutely indefensible from the point of view of service for those people who use the trains.

We are dealing with the issue of safety as well. When transport companies have to cut corners, obviously maintenance and safety are affected. I refer to employee health and safety as well as the safety of those who use the service. We know as well that the implications of this Bill will be particularly hard-hitting on women. Many of the jobs to be eliminated are presently filled by women.

It is a free trade issue as well. The eventual domination of our transportation industry by foreign companies is a very likely outcome of this process. I might note that the process was initiated by the former Liberal Government. The former Minister of Transport, the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy), was a chief architect of this proposal which would have such destructive implications for communities all across Canada. Small business will suffer from these proposals. Regional expansion will be affected. Certainly the bulk commodity shippers are concerned about captive shipper provisions which may drastically increase their costs.

Members of the NDP filed a minority report to the report *Freedom to Move*. My colleagues, the Hon. Members for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin) and Thunder Bay—Atikokan (Mr. Angus) raised a number of very important concerns. They noted that the Government should be planning to provide more safety inspectors in the transportation sector and not cutting back on an already inadequate number. As well, there must be an effective monitoring agency. I have touched on the question of employment. I would underline that we are talking about 750,000 Canadians employed directly or indirectly in the transportation sector. The Government has not done its homework. It has not adequately examined the implications of deregulation on jobs. There have been no impact studies whatsoever. At a time when unemployment in Canada is already far too high, that kind of negligence is completely unacceptable.

*[Translation]*

Mr. Speaker, this measure will give the U.S. railways and trucking companies easy access to Canada, while there is no reciprocal advantage for Canadian railways and trucking companies in the United States. This is a flagrant betrayal of our independence.

It is not the first time, Mr. Speaker. Once again, the Government is happily selling off part of our national sovereignty, as it has so obviously been doing in the free trade negotiations and the softwood lumber episode.

Mr. Speaker, I just spent two days in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean area, where I met people from Chicoutimi, Jonquière, Alma and several other towns in the region. They are afraid. If today, the Government is ready to cave in to U.S. pressure on softwood lumber, they wonder what tomorrow will bring. Will it be pulp and paper? What will it be, Mr. Speaker? This Government is prepared to give up our independence in all those sectors.

Mr. Speaker, if we leave the transportation sector open to free market forces, to free enterprise and competition, carriers