

Canadian National Railways and Air Canada

I venture to say that service on an Air Canada flight to my province can only be compared to the third-class service one used to get on the Newfoundland railway prior to the expressed intention of downgrading passenger service so that it could be eliminated altogether. If I had the time, Mr. Speaker, I could relate the greatest stories that could ever be told in connection with air travel to Newfoundland.

I have made some 132 trips to my district in the last five years, most of them by Air Canada, and the inconveniences I have experienced, and which must have been shared by most of the west Newfoundland passengers, are hard to exaggerate. The attitude of the stewardesses on these flights indicates they feel it is a punishment trip inflicted upon them for something they did wrong. I can say without fear of contradiction that many of them do not even know where they are going. Certainly they do not know the stops after they leave Sydney, because I have heard their announcements. Certainly, too, Air Canada officials do not know what it means to provide a little comfort for passengers; after trips back to my district I often end up with a charleyhorse.

In their efforts to save a few dollars, officials tend to eliminate or curtail service to citizens who are just as much Canadian as those in the larger urban centres. Here, again, no consideration has been given to the continued build-up of traffic, both passengers and freight, to and from the west coast of Newfoundland. I can only suggest that officials of Air Canada, particularly the vice-presidents of every department, should follow the example of the service provided in the smaller centres by their Air Canada staff and learn what service really means, even though they do enjoy a monopoly of passenger service.

To summarize, Mr. Speaker, I would refer to the obligation undertaken by Canada toward the province of Newfoundland in accordance with the Terms of Union, specifically section 32 which states:

Canada will maintain, in accordance with traffic offering, a freight and passenger steamship service between North Sydney and Port aux Basques which, on completion of a motor highway between Corner Brook and Port aux Basques, will include suitable provision for the carriage of motor vehicles.

For the purpose of railway rate regulation the Island of Newfoundland will be included in the maritime region of Canada, and through traffic moving between North Sydney and Port aux Basques will be treated as all rail traffic.

All legislation of the Parliament of Canada providing the special rates on traffic moving within, into, or out of, the maritime region will, as far as appropriate, be made applicable to the island of Newfoundland.

Mr. Speaker, these terms are very vague and do not meet the changing conditions which have come about over the years since 1949. It is incumbent, then, upon the Government of Canada to review the Terms of Union to give Newfoundland the consideration it deserves as part of our great Canadian nation. It is obvious that the Minister of Transport is cognizant of the transportation needs of all Canada—he has shown his sympathy—and I can only request that even though the population of the province of Newfoundland makes up only a small proportion of our nation, he will recognize, as pledged by his Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and many of his colleagues, that every Canadian, regardless of where he lives, should be able to enjoy the benefits of Canada's wealth and quality of life.

[Mr. Marshall.]

● (2040)

Mr. Doug Rowland (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, I should like to use the same point of departure as the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall), and that is to say that it is about time this country, and specifically its government, took a good, long, hard look at its transportation policy. Indeed, that look is long overdue. The government should begin immediately preparation of a paper on transportation policy that will take into consideration road, rail, air and sea transportation and which would be transportation's equivalent of the orange paper on social security that was presented to this House earlier this session. In other words, we require a draft national transportation policy. We urgently require a document that could serve as the focal point for discussion of transportation in Canada by the relevant parliamentary committees, public servants both federal and provincial, the transportation industry, unions and management and by other interested parties.

To my mind, the point of departure for any such paper should be that transportation is part of the infrastructure of this country and an instrument of national policy, one of the several means that a nation can employ to realize national ends, such as the elimination of regional economic disparities and the arresting of the trend toward rural depopulation and the overgrowth of our cities. In a phrase, the point of departure of any such study should be service to the public rather than consideration of profitability. Such a study should set out national objectives and the design of a transportation policy to serve those objectives. Profitability should be a very much secondary consideration. This is not the case today with respect to the transportation policy of Canada, such as it is.

To me, it is the epitome of madness to see the Canadian Transportation Commission making decisions with respect to rail line abandonments that take into account the profit and loss picture for that particular piece of line but not the costs that would be incurred by provincial governments which, in order to replace that abandoned line, would have to build more highways capable of carrying much heavier bus and truck traffic, at the costs of farmers and merchants affected who would have to abandon trucks suitable for short-haul situations and purchase new and vastly more expensive long-haul equipment.

It is absolutely ridiculous to hear the Minister of State responsible for housing and urban affairs assert the necessity of arresting the trend toward increasing concentration of the Canadian population in a few urban centres and virtually simultaneously have the Air Transport Board approve an application by Transair Midwest to abandon its Brandon-Dauphin-Yorkton run. Obviously, if urban growth is not to continue at a horrifyingly unacceptable rate, smaller centres will have to be made more attractive to the existing population, especially the young people who live there, to industry, and to industry's skilled employees most of whom are now located in major urban centres. One obvious means of accomplishing that objective is to provide smaller centres with rapid transportation facilities, rail and air as well as road, as closely equivalent as possible to those available in major urban centres. Certainly permitting abandonment of services