

National Transportation Policy

I will do my utmost to answer as thoroughly as I can in the limited time I have available. I am sure he and hon. members will appreciate that this is one of the most complex subjects and, of necessity, a subject of this kind has to be dealt with to some extent at least in generalizations rather than in specifics.

I also have something of a problem as to the priority I give to the several approaches to this problem as they relate to what the hon. member has had to say, because I have heard the hon. member for Annapolis Valley (Mr. Nowlan) say that he would like me, quite understandably, to devote the majority of the time I have to the whole question of transportation policy as it relates to the Atlantic provinces. On the other hand I realize, as indeed the hon. member for Moncton has, that there are other issues and other questions which really ought to be dealt with in a debate of this sort.

Let me say at the outset that really what has been established by the hon. member for Moncton is the philosophical question which has been at the root of transportation problems in Canada for perhaps 100 years, or for as long, indeed, as there have been Crown corporations and other agencies of a similar nature which one Parliament after another has affirmed in a more or less independent role. It would be presumptuous of me to tell members with far greater experience than I in this House the history of these organizations, but the truth of the matter is that one government after another, and one political party after another of all political persuasions, have constantly reaffirmed that in so far as direct government intervention or even parliamentary intervention is concerned, that no doubt this was anathema in respect of what might be described, as it was today, an organization of corporations and agencies.

May I give three examples to illustrate what I mean. The hon. member referred, for example, to the Canadian Transport Commission. Some of us were members of the committee which heard the long evidence that led to the establishment of that commission. Some of us were members of this House when, in fact, the National Transportation Act was passed in 1967. Members will be aware of the very great fears which were expressed at that time that the Canadian Transport Commission would not remain what might be described as an at-arms-length organization and would not retain its quasi-judicial aspect, but might be subject to political or other undesirable pressures. Therefore, I have to call to the attention of the House the fact that there is a very clearcut distinction between those matters which can be dealt with by the Canadian Transport Commission under the authority granted to it by the act, and those matters in which I can become involved or the government can become involved, being matters of what might be described as national policy. As long as the National Transportation Act exists, it constitutes national policy in that particular field.

I do not presume today to comment in any detailed way on the propriety or otherwise of the judgments of the Canadian Transport Commission. I do want to point out a few interesting facts in respect of some of the commission's activities in the relatively few years in which it has been in operation. There appears to be an impression abroad, and here I am referring expressly to the work of

[Mr. Jamieson.]

the CTC and not to the railways, which I hope to deal with in just a few minutes, that the Canadian Transport Commission has had something to do with cancellation of passenger services. In spite of this impression, which appears to be widespread, the fact of the matter is that since the National Transportation Act took effect in 1967 only about 6 per cent of passenger train mileage in Canada has been discontinued, and this had involved less than 6 per cent of total passenger traffic. A great many hearings have been held and a great many recommendations in one form or another have been made, but in terms of actual passenger train mileage or passenger traffic which has been eliminated or discontinued in Canada, this constitutes something less than 6 per cent over all.

In the case of southwestern Ontario, to which the hon. member referred, it is again interesting to note that the commission did conduct an investigation of the operations in that region. The facts are well known to hon. members and to the public. The decision there came as the result of the fact it was shown that less than 20 passengers were being carried per train on that particular route. Here, once again, I am not going to argue the merits of this decision, or suggest whether it was a wise decision. I am simply pointing out that it was a decision in fact made by the commission entirely within its own responsibility, in which it was impossible in any way, shape or form for the government to have any influence even had it chosen to exercise it. But the hon. member did not say, and I should like to emphasize this, that there are in fact provisions which Parliament very wisely put into this bill which do apply and which have a wide variety of appeal procedures included in them. Several appeals, in fact have been lodged both in this case and in others and in most respects have been disposed of in what I believe to be a satisfactory fashion.

• (1530)

Without spending too much time on this particular point, let me re-emphasize the fact that the Canadian Transport Commission is an independent body deliberately created by this Parliament to carry on a particular function. The suggestion that in some way or other the government or the Ministry of Transport is derelict in its duty because of some judgment of the CTC with which some members may disagree is in fact a misinterpretation of the facts of the matter.

An hon. Member: Do they do a proper job?

An hon. Member: They do not.

Mr. Jamieson: The question arises whether they do a proper job and then another hon. member says "they do not". These are matters of opinion. I repeat that in cases where it is the judgment of any individual that an appropriate job has not been done, there are appeal procedures and these procedures can be instituted either through the Minister of Transport or the Governor in Council.

An hon. Member: The chairman is your good friend.

Mr. Jamieson: I can assure the hon. gentleman—in the event it was not heard he said the chairman is my good friend and what good would this do—that he should not