

Atlantic Regional Freight Assistance Act

● (11:00 a.m.)

My contention is that a given amount of assistance in freight rates or assistance to the transportation of maritime products to natural markets such as the West Indies would do more and be of greater assistance to the industries in the maritime provinces than merely freight assistance from the Atlantic region to other parts of Canada as provided for in this legislation.

Mr. Skoberg: Mr. Chairman, I support the concern echoed by the hon. member for Annapolis Valley. In my opinion it is a very shoddy way of handling house business to have this bill before the house at this time when the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications is meeting at eleven o'clock. The other day the standing committee was meeting at the same time this bill was introduced. I believe all members of the standing committee are most concerned about hearing the debate on this bill. It is rather difficult to have a continuing effort on the part of all hon. members if this method of handling house business is to continue. I ask the minister through you, Mr. Chairman, to do something to provide other means of handling legislation that he will be bringing before the house because I am sure this also puts him in an embarrassing position.

My colleagues in my party stated our position the other day and I will not repeat it. The main concern of many people today is whether the benefits of any assistance given to any form of transportation will go directly to the users. Another concern has been expressed which I wish to repeat. In the event assistance is granted to the trucking industry, where trucking companies are owned by the railways there must be controls and safeguards in the legislation and regulations to ensure there will not be a monopoly in the setting of rates. I believe this matter has been fully gone into. It is a concern of many people in this country. If there is a monopoly and these concessions are made throughout the industry, they may overstep their rights in this regard. The minister in particular should watch this very closely.

I support the concern expressed by the hon. member for Annapolis Valley with regard to section 5(1) as outlined in the news release of the Minister of Transport. I shall pose two questions for the minister's consideration. I will have to read *Hansard* to find out his

answers. In the third paragraph of the minister's news release he states:

—it had been decided instead to ask Parliament to give the Governor in Council authority to remove this assistance on various commodities or classes of traffic as recommended by a new joint federal-provincial committee which will be set up for this purpose.

On the last page of the news release it is indicated:

The new bill incorporates the substances of Bill C-182 introduced on March 19, 1969, under which it was proposed to extend for one year the existing freeze on non-competitive carload rail freight rates on Atlantic region shipments, but it provides that the freeze can be terminated before the end of the year by the Governor in Council.

I may be unjustly concerned about power being given to the Governor in Council, but I have always been of the opinion that those people most directly concerned with any legislation should have a say in any changes that may be made in that legislation. I am pleased to see there has been a recommendation to establish an Atlantic Region Transportation Board. I ask the minister to clarify why some other avenue of authority could not be utilized to determine the freight rates the minister referred to in his news release. I am sure he can make that point much clearer.

It appears that clauses 5(1) and 5(2) require to be looked at closely. The hon. member for Annapolis Valley has already referred to the portion which states that the Governor in Council may vary or remove. This merits some consideration and possibly revision. Possibly the minister will be prepared to accept amendments which may be forthcoming to clarify this picture. It poses some questions in the minds of some members of our party. The fear in this regard was quite ably expressed by the hon. member for Annapolis Valley. I mentioned previously that the Governor in Council has been given considerable power in these provisions. I ask the minister to clarify the concerns I have expressed when he replies.

It seems strange indeed that when the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications was in the east examining the over-all problem, an announcement was made in the house that the Prince Edward Island causeway would not be proceeded with. Maritime freight rates were considered by the cabinet and the minister without being considered by the committee. There is not much use in a committee of this house travelling throughout the country unless some consideration is given to its recommendations. I say in all sincerity there is no purpose in having