

Supply—Transport

home to the valley to tell their expectant wives and children of the unfortunate change in plans. And their wives, in any kind of condition say, as they usually do, that in the valley the ceiling is high and the weather clear.

I now come, sir, to the sea—and I know the minister from the maritimes has a special fondness for it. But I challenge him, with all his nautical ability and experience before the wind, be it political or otherwise, to dock the schooner he once possessed at Digby wharf in any type of gale.

Mr. Pickersgill: I have lost her, so it would be impossible.

Mr. Nowlan: Well, it is difficult even if you have a ferry, like the one we had, which plies to Saint John. I know the minister has heard the many representations which have been made about the inadequate wharf at Digby, and the archaic ferry service to Saint John. In the days of sail and early steam Nova Scotia had, for those days, sufficient transportation service to the New England and upper Canadian markets. But while there has been progress in every other field the present and only ferry connection for all western Nova Scotia to the rest of Canada and the market of Montreal, via Saint John, has continually slipped behind.

Can members of this committee believe in this day and age of tractor-trailer transport that the C.P.R. ferry between Saint John and Digby cannot take any vehicle larger than a half-ton truck. And this is supposed to be the eastern terminus of a national company discharging its responsibility to the people of the maritimes.

Mr. Chairman, the lack of modern transportation facilities to the markets of New England, Montreal and Toronto, is crippling the growth of all western Nova Scotia. Not only does this gap in transportation prohibit any growth in industry, but it is stifling what we already have. Not only are we handicapped in getting our goods to market, but because of the complicated and lengthy transshipment process we have hurdles to overcome in getting machinery and parts to service our plants.

• (8:30 p.m.)

I believe the minister has already acknowledged that this ferry service is an essential link in our national transportation network. If it is essential, it is certainly not now effective. I appreciate a commission is now studying maritime transportation problems,

but we do not know when it will report. There is some rumour that it will not be for 18 months, and we all know that can be two years or more. Why is it necessary to wait that long before any move is made to improve an essential service which even the minister himself admits is essential, and which all people in the east recognize is ineffective? Surely negotiations should be under way with the C.P.R. to define the areas of responsibility and start action on improving a service which is worse than in the horse and buggy days.

There is a precedent for action, the type of action which a dynamic government could take. For several years I lived and worked in British Columbia. I think that experience was a broadening one. While Premier Bennett and I did not see eye to eye on several subjects, he does get things done. For years in B.C. the C.P.R. was providing an ineffectual service to Vancouver Island. People complained. The economy suffered. Finally, Mr. Bennett took action: He took over the ferries and his service is now the showcase for the entire Pacific northwest.

The responsibility for the maintenance and improvement of this service rests primarily with the federal government. If the C.P.R. will not live up to its obligations, then the government has to act. The cloaking of the issue in a commission does not solve the present problem. A half-ton truck may provide transportation, Mr. Chairman, but it does not provide service. The people look for action. We hope the minister will act, and activate the present inactive situation.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Chairman, if I may be pardoned a personal reference, during the course of this debate I have found myself recalling one of the first speeches that I had occasion to make in the House of Commons shortly after I first came here nearly 24 years ago. That speech was an attack on the C.P.R. On that occasion, however, I was as popular in this house as a skunk at a garden party.

Mr. Byrne: That has not changed.

Mr. Churchill: What makes you think there has been a change?

Mr. Knowles: I was about to say that the situation has changed but I think there were one or two interjections which would spoil that follow-up on my part. However, Mr. Chairman, because the case against the C.P.R. has been made so fully and has been documented so well, it is not necessary for me to