

Supply—Transport

The situation in my constituency has been very difficult, and it is still uncertain whether the ice has actually gone out.

The Bell island-Portugal Cove ferry service was particularly hard hit this winter as a result of ice conditions. But for the provision of these two new icebreakers, the unfortunate people of Bell island would have been isolated, and would have suffered great hardships as a result of the lack of daily supplies.

I should also ask the minister to indicate when he expects to bring forward legislation setting up the St. John's harbour commission to administer that very important harbour which is now under development by the Department of Public Works.

Mr. Chairman, I should like to have the opportunity, when we are considering the various items of this department, to ask further questions of the minister concerning the jurisdiction of the Bell island ferry service. I suggest there should be some definition brought forward by this government regarding the operation on this service of a ferry which is owned by the federal government, but which operates under provincial franchise. There have been many difficulties resulting from this situation, but I do not intend to burden this committee with them at this time. I ask the minister to give this situation consideration in the preparation of his reply, and to indicate the steps which have been taken toward the solution of this situation regarding the jurisdiction of this service, so that the service can be properly operated and provided with federal subsidies if they are required—as in other provinces.

Mr. Granger: I should like to congratulate the minister on his appointment. I have two of the largest airports in Canada in my riding, namely Goose and Gander. Coming from the Atlantic seaboard where sea transport is so important, I have a particular interest in the estimates of this department. Before going any further I should like to express my appreciation of the interest which the minister has taken in communications on the Labrador and of the steps he is in the process of taking to provide better communications on that coast. I should like to assure him that the service thus provided is out of all proportion to the cost involved, and that a vital service to isolated areas will be supplied by those additional radio telephone sets.

While speaking of communications, I should like to mention as well the good work which Canadian National Telegraphs have done. In saying this I should mention that over the years since Newfoundland entered confederation they have extended a better service to

parts of my district. I should like to emphasize the necessity of expanding the program so that all the places which have an indifferent service, such as parts of Green bay and White bay, may in time and before too long have a better communications system and long distance telephone connections.

My hon. friend from St. John's East mentioned icebreakers. I think I should also make a comment about the icebreaker service in Newfoundland. It is only fair to say that this year ice conditions were entirely unusual. I realize the department cannot build a fleet of icebreakers to take care of an unusually bad year. In normal years some of them would be lying up. I think every reasonable person would agree with this statement. But the presence of a Russian icebreaker off the Newfoundland coast, and this icebreaker flying in men by helicopter to kill seals, should be an indication to us that it will be necessary in the future to supply icebreaker support to the sealing fleet. I believe that as much as possible this was done during the past season. As I said, this year was a most unusual one. The ice was exceedingly heavy and covered exceedingly vast areas; but for future planning the use of icebreakers in conjunction with the sealing fleet should be kept in mind because, as I said, the presence of a Russian icebreaker off the coast of Newfoundland is a sign of the times which none of us can afford to ignore.

Again, I think icebreakers should be utilized to extend the periods of service of the Canadian National coastal boats which serve northern Newfoundland and Labrador. Those boats have given an excellent service, but the period of operation is restricted. There is a growing feeling that, with the availability of icebreakers, in normal years the period of operation of C.N.R. boats should be extended. I said a moment ago that the service which the C.N.R. coastal boats has given is excellent; but in the late fall it does not appear to be adequate for the great northern peninsula or Labrador. It has been suggested that instead of steamers leaving St. John's and/or Lewisporte and making a trip right around the northern part of the island to Corner Brook and then back again, it might be an improvement if the ships sailed from Corner Brook and St. John's and met at St. Anthony or Cook's Harbour and then returned; in other words, if this long run were split up into two return trips. One ship would leave St. Anthony and return and the other one would leave Corner Brook and return. People in that area have suggested that. I am not an expert on these matters but I should like to pass along the suggestion which has been passed along to me.