

largely, and this reversion to coal has taken place and is still occurring. If the boats were operating at points where it was difficult to obtain bunker coal there might be reason for incurring the additional expense. In the first place the expense of fitting up these boats as oil burners will be considerable. The costs of operation will be very much higher than they are to-day with coal. There is no difficulty in obtaining bunkers for they are readily available at any of the ports from which the initial voyage is made, either from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, or on the St. Lawrence to the West Indies and vice versa. I should like the minister to take that point into consideration.

Mr. DUNNING: My hon. friend's observations in that regard will be given due weight. The proposals I submitted the other evening regarding conversion were proposals made by officers of the merchant marine. That however is a detail which I have not yet examined sufficiently to be able to say finally shall be carried out.

Mr. CANTLEY: I thank the minister for the explanation. The next point I want to refer to briefly is this. It has been the custom for these boats in the summer months when coming from the West Indies, instead of calling at Halifax or St. John, as they do in winter, to complete the voyage at Montreal. I rather consider that a mistake. At any rate, I would point out that these boats in the past have been in the habit of coming up the St. Lawrence too early in the season. That is to say, the first voyage up the St. Lawrence has been at a time when the weather and ice conditions are not favourable to passengers coming directly from the warm climate of the West Indies, and the result has been that in a number of cases personally known to me people who have come up the St. Lawrence through the drift ice have caught cold and been seriously ill, in some cases having to be taken to hospital immediately after arrival. If the boats are to come up the St. Lawrence in the summer months I want to urge on the minister the importance of deferring the first voyage, until at least all ice is out of the gulf. They should not come up as early as they have done in the past. If they continue to make the trip so early in the season our people will take an unfortunate view of that voyage from the West Indies. April is the period of the great migration from the West Indies of people who have been spending their winter there. In April and May the boats are crowded coming north; the same being true in the autumn months going south.

There is another and broader matter in connection with this whole question, and that is interference by government with private enterprise. I presume the minister has taken this point into consideration. Trade between the West Indies and Halifax and other maritime ports has been going on now for between a hundred and a hundred and fifty years, and many old established houses are thoroughly familiar with it. They have gone through all the vicissitudes of sail and steam, and know all that has transpired in the last seventy-five or hundred years or more in that trade. It seems rather a pity that these people should be called upon now practically to give up their business by competing with a company organized by this Dominion, with all the power, influence, resources and money of the government behind it. I was going to make a suggestion in this regard. One of the ministers a few nights ago, when the subject was under discussion, submitted certain figures as his estimate of the losses that would ensue from the operation of a line, running into about three-quarters of a million and diminishing to half a million later on. Supposing the government, instead of asking for tenders for the construction of the boats, should make an offer of a subsidy which they are prepared to pay, the subsidy being about the amount which they estimate their loss to be; we could see in that way whether or not offers would be received from steamship companies, either those already in the business or others disposed to take it up. Then we would be relieved from all anxiety in regard to the cost over and above any estimate of the officers of the department, because they are only estimates after all. Again I would refer to the unfairness of interfering in this way as we now propose to do, with private enterprise in view of the fact that these boats or the profits arising from them are not taxed when private enterprise is taxed; if the private company is fortunate enough to make some profit we take a portion of that away in taxes. The competition seems rather unfair, and I would suggest that an effort be made along the lines I have indicated or in some other way to try to discover if it is not possible to get a private company to take over this service rather than have the government embark on what is after all an entirely new and distinct business.

Mr. DUNNING: I would respectfully point out to my hon. friend that the suggestion he makes with regard to a further effort to get private enterprise to undertake this work is of course entirely contrary to the principle advanced by his colleague from West Calgary