

Transportation

that passenger rail service. Many communities along that route suffered, making the transportation problem even harder. People were forced to rely on buses and other modes of transport, to the detriment of their travel schedules.

That was the first blow that we received only about a year and a half ago. More recently, in fact a couple of weeks ago, the Minister of Transport dealt us another blow by announcing a cut-back in the operation of the ship canal or lock at Sault Ste. Marie. We have only one Canadian lock to bring vessels from Lake Superior to the lower Great Lakes. The rest of the locks are owned by the United States. Our lock was an old one that had not been upgraded or enlarged over the years and was indeed allowed to deteriorate.

The first rumour was that the government was going to close the lock at Sault Ste. Marie by 1982. It was based on the erroneous argument that the lock was no longer commercially viable, that tonnage was being reduced, and therefore, the government could not afford the \$1 million annual expenditure to keep the lock open. Representations were made by myself, the union involved, the city council of Sault Ste. Marie and the hon. member for Algoma (Mr. Foster). Our arguments were in favour of increasing the usage of the lock by upgrading and indeed building a larger lock. Those arguments fell on deaf ears.

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I should like to examine the minister's argument in favour of cutting back the service provided by the lock. He has cut out the night shift, which means the lock no longer operates on a 24-hour basis. The inevitable result of that is a reduction of the tonnage going through that lock. Thus, this time next year the Minister of Transport will be in a position to produce figures indicating that the tonnage is down even more, and that therefore the lock is not commercially viable and must be closed.

When the announcement was first made regarding the closure of that lock, I made immediate representations to the minister as to why I felt the lock should remain open and indeed should be improved. The Minister of Transport sent a letter to me dated February 15, 1978, dealing with the prospect for growth in traffic and whether the lock should remain open. In part the letter reads as follows:

Nevertheless, when I look at projections of traffic through the Canadian-American lock system at Sault Ste. Marie, I note that no capacity problems are envisaged until some time after 1995. In these times of financial restraint for the federal government, I am doubtful that there would be much merit in Transport Canada undertaking a cost-benefit analysis of a new super lock, since there would be very few benefits in terms of a more efficient transportation system until after that date.

The minister has erred by not doing a cost-benefit analysis. He has not taken into account some recent developments. That is the reason I appeal to the Minister of Transport to reconsider his argument that he does not foresee any problems concerning growth in the system and the need for building a new and larger lock at Sault Ste. Marie.

The minister has not taken into account some recent figures concerning projected coal shipments from western Canada to

Thunder Bay, and then through the St. Lawrence seaway system, in order to fulfil Ontario Hydro contracts. By 1980, 3.9 million tons of coal will be delivered annually to Thunder Bay, and then trans-shipped by water to various points in the Great Lakes. That represents a 12 per cent increase in total Canadian coal production. It means that increased tonnage will go through that lock system, carrying coal to various parts of Canada. In light of that increased tonnage projection, there is a strong argument in favour of that lock's hours of operation not being reduced. The 24 hour operation should be maintained, and indeed the size of the lock should be expanded, or a new one should be built.

This would ensure a Canadian presence and a Canadian option at this important junction in the Great Lakes. Of course, that is important in terms of future bargaining on the seaway, but also it would help our failing shipping industry. New vessels will have to be built to trans-ship the coal. They will be larger vessels. Thus, the expansion of the lock would encourage the Canadian shipbuilding industry to make use of this new movement of goods.

Also I am discouraged that the federal government has not taken into account, aside from the need for a Canadian presence at the lock and the need for a fully operative lock at that point, the fact that this lock provides annually an infusion of \$1 million into the local economy of Sault Ste. Marie in terms of wages, repair work and other contracts let in conjunction with the operation of the lock. That is not an insignificant sum, especially considering the repressed state of much of the economy in northern Ontario.

As an alternative, the minister proposes building an historic park in the area and infusing \$170,000 a year for the maintenance of that park. That falls far short of the revenues which would be generated locally by maintaining the full operation of the lock. We should not be backed into an "either/or" situation. An historic park in the area is compatible with a full-time commercial operation of the lock. Indeed, it is important for our tourist industry. Some 80,000 visitors are attracted each year to the lock to watch its operations. The Americans attract over one million visitors a year who view the operations of their lock. The reason the Americans are able to attract more people is because larger vessels can be handled by their lock. By upgrading our lock, a shot in the arm would be given to the tourist industry in the area.

Also I am disturbed by the information which the minister has been given by officials in his department concerning the actual tonnage going through the lock. His figures indicate that in 1972, 1,120,570 tons went through the lock; by 1976 it had declined to 564,350 tons. The figures I have obtained from the union involved, which are the figures of the lock itself, indicate that in 1972 the tonnage was 1,523,754; in 1976, 1,288,903; and declining in 1977 to 709,890 tons.

Those figures are very different from the figures of the minister. They do not indicate as dramatic a drop as his figures do. The factor which has not been taken into account, as far as the drop in 1977 is concerned, is the summer-long strike in 1977 of the iron mining industry in Minnesota. Also,