

Search and Rescue Services

Is it a perfect system? No, it is not. Is there a need for a study? No, there is no need for another study. We have studies coming out of our ears. What we need is a little less rhetoric, a little less pointing of the finger and cheap politics, a little less undermining, a little less bad mouthing of the men and women involved in search and rescue in the country. They get a raw deal from people who continually shout that everything is wrong. They get a raw deal from people who keep saying that everything is bad. Those people are doing a very good job and if they had more resources they would do a better job. No one argues that point.

I suppose if we had an unlimited number of helicopters in every community, things would be better. There are 135 communities in my riding and I am sure every one of them can see the need for one place in or near that particular community. This whole thing could be carried to the ridiculous, as I have done in the last few moments, in order to make a point.

Mr. McGrath: You are the disgrace.

Mr. Simmons: Mr. Speaker, if the yardstick for my disgrace is that I take a position different from that taken by the Hon. Member for St. John's East on search and rescue, I am glad to be the disgrace.

Mr. McGrath: You are when you are the only Newfoundlander to—

Mr. Simmons: The Hon. Member says I am the only Newfoundlander, etc. I will give him a unique category. He is the only Newfoundlander who went into a Cabinet without lifting a finger on an issue which he says is important, and that is the issue of search and rescue. He never lifted his finger for nine or ten months. That is the kind of action we got from the man who now would be the solver of all problems. Search and rescue needs less rhetoric and a little more support for what is a good system and would be a better system if it were not continually undermined by people like the Hon. Member for St. John's East.

Mr. Taylor: Look who is talking.

Mr. Siddon: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As the mover of the main motion I should like to ask the indulgence of Hon. Members present to extend the sitting until 6.15 p.m. so that the full hour might be accorded to this important debate and a more positive light might be placed upon it than has been the case by the speaker who just resumed his seat.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): The House has heard the proposal put forward by the Hon. Member for Richmond-South Delta (Mr. Siddon). Is there consent to that proposal?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Jim Manly (Cowichan-Malahat-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this motion although I regret the tone of debate in the last half hour with name calling on both sides of the House rather than dealing with the very serious issue. The motion that stands in the name

of the Member for Richmond-South Delta calls for an independent commission to inquire into the whole question of search and rescue on Canada's West Coast. Incidentally, I support the amendment that would extend this to Canada's East Coast. We have to take the broad view of this subject.

There are certainly some very serious problems on the East Coast. In this Party we recognize that it is a difficult coast to monitor. It has a sparse population in some areas, the costs are high, but there have been some very tragic losses of life on that coast. It is the responsibility of the Government to provide adequate search and rescue facilities there.

Another interdepartmental study would do nothing to help deal with the many problems associated with search and rescue on the coast. An independent commission with members who would look at the whole context of search and rescue—for example, the use of volunteers, the need for helicopters, the kind of vessels that could service the area—all this would be helpful, rather than people who are concerned with protecting their departments.

The motion came up as a result of the tragic accident that occurred on Christmas Day of 1979 when 30 crewmen lost their lives in the sinking of the *Lee Wang Zin* off the northern coast of British Columbia. Sometimes it takes a major accident like that to arouse the public and bring its attention to what is really happening. This situation has been raised time and again in the House. While a tragedy the scope of the *Lee Wang Zin* has not been repeated on the West Coast in the last four years, it has been on the East Coast so the problem is a continuing one. In any given year there are dozens of smaller sinkings and smaller incidents. It has been estimated that an average of 50 lives are lost per year in incidents off our coasts.

As a United Church minister, it has been my responsibility at different times in the past to deal with the families of some of the people who lost their lives. It is a difficult task at best but how much more difficult and tragic it is when the situation could have been prevented had proper search and rescue facilities been in place and proper procedures followed. This, Mr. Speaker, is why we urge that this motion be adopted and a commission appointed.

● (1800)

We have raised this issue a number of times but progress is very slow. It seems that the Government has trouble in responding to distress calls along the Pacific Coast. When comparing the facilities and the equipment which are available to the Pacific Coast with that which is available to the East Coast, we find that in terms of the miles of coast which have to be covered and the number of incidents, we are far behind in the apportionment of money and resources.

The Hon. Member for Skeena (Mr. Fulton) has raised the problem of the type-400 search and rescue vessels which were recently deployed on the West Coast. They had to be taken out of service, Mr. Speaker, because it was found that the welding was defective. Those vessels are now back in service. However, a letter from the former Minister of Transport to my col-