

Adjournment Debate

The mediator met with the parties December 16 and 17 but there was no agreement forthcoming.

Mediation meetings resumed on January 16, 1991, this time at the request of the union. As the minister mentioned, the representative parties should ask for the mediator to intervene. After three days of intensive negotiations the Mint made an offer which the union agreed to put to a vote of the union membership on January 20. The offer was rejected by the union membership and the work stoppage is continuing.

The parties subsequently met directly on January 24 and 25 but unfortunately their discussions did not lead to an agreement.

As a result of further discussions the union membership is to vote this evening on a further management proposal. We understand the union bargaining committee will recommend acceptance of the proposal to the union membership and if ratified all bargaining unit members in Winnipeg and Ottawa would be recalled to return; in Winnipeg, within 48 hours and in Ottawa within the next two or three days.

We want to thank the member for her interest. Certainly we are interested in seeing an end to this work stoppage in the very near future.

FERRY SERVICE

Mr. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to bring up the concerns of my constituents before the House. The issue today arose from a question I asked the Minister of State for Transport last October concerning the Wood Islands ferry service in my riding. This is a very important link to the mainland and I would like to give the House a little more information on the issue.

In May 1988 the then Minister of Transport flew to Prince Edward Island to announce that a new ferry would be built for the Wood Islands-Caribou crossing, and that the ferry would be in place for 1990. However, it seems that as soon as P.E.I. sent four Liberal MPs to Ottawa the government started dragging its feet.

After I sent numerous letters to three Ministers of Transport, the government finally awarded a contract for a new ferry to be delivered only three years behind schedule. In late September the Minister of Transport responded to a letter I wrote raising certain questions about the impact the fixed link would have on the Wood Islands ferry service. Specifically I asked that there be no reduction in the operating subsidy for the service and

that the government give a permanent commitment for the continuation of the ferry service.

In his letter the minister said, and I quote: "I am unable to make a permanent commitment for the continuation of the Wood Islands-Caribou ferry service". He went on to say that no hasty decisions would be made. In that context I asked the Minister of State for Transport for an assurance for a permanent ferry service from Wood Islands, P.E.I. In her answer the minister said: "I would not make a permanent promise of this. I promise to look into it".

Simply put, promises to look into it are not good enough. The government should not be looking into it at all. The government should come clean and give the people of Prince Edward Island and the people of Cardigan the guarantees they need in order to plan the financial future for eastern Prince Edward Island. How can people plan businesses that require transportation services when the government will not say if the service will be there in 10 years' time?

We are at a crossroads in P.E.I. right now. The government has accepted three proposals for the construction of the fixed link. After Public Works does a cost analysis and accepts a bidder, construction on the fixed link will begin. The Government of P.E.I. has stated clearly that it has 10 conditions that must be met before the final approval of this project is given.

Before the federal government awards a contract I think there are at least three requirements that must be met. The Wood Islands-Caribou ferry services must be maintained and updated, which means there will be no decrease in the operating subsidy.

Fishermen must be duly compensated for any loss caused by the construction and the operation of the fixed link. The federal government must ensure that the over-all environmental impact will be kept to a minimum.

These are my concerns as the member of Parliament for Cardigan. When the minister answered my question in October the response was unsatisfactory. I hope the response from the government this time will go further to ease the concerns of my constituents and give us some assurance that we will have a connection with the mainland.

Mr. Lee Richardson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, the ferry service between Wood Islands, P.E.I. and Caribou, Nova Scotia has been operated by Northumberland Ferries Limited