

Extension of Railway to Gaspé

Although the previous representations were not in exactly the terms I have used in my resolution, Mr. Speaker, and in some cases did not suggest the same solution to our transportation problem, they were made for the same purpose I have in mind, that is, the economic development of the region, which has been refused the bare minimum of transportation facilities—and this even in this modern age, four centuries after the first white man set foot on the soil of Gaspé. Among the early and prominent advocates for better transportation facilities in the Gaspé peninsula, I must mention the late Bishop of Gaspé, Monsignor F. X. Ross, who in 1923, at a gathering in the old church of Bonaventure, explained the needs of the region to the late Sir Henry Thornton. On this occasion the bishop concluded his remarks to Sir Henry by saying: "The fate of Gaspé is in your hands." The same short and appropriate sentence was repeated to Sir Henry's successor, Mr. Hungerford, in 1932 by Hon. L. A. Taschereau, then premier of Quebec, who wrote: "The fate of Gaspé is in your hands."

In 1927 the Canadian National authorities refused to recommend the purchase of the Canada and Gulf Terminal Railway at a price equivalent to par on the outstanding bonds, namely, \$1,400,000. This figure was then deemed too high. A further refusal at the price of \$828,000 was recorded in 1937. In 1941, Mr. A. J. Lapointe, then member of parliament for the federal constituency of Matapédia-Matane, made a fresh attempt, but his efforts were of no avail. One of the arguments put forward by the Canadian National at that time was competition from highway traffic. This argument was particularly weak, since it applied to a region in which the roads are virtually closed to traffic on wheels for a period of approximately six months in the year.

In 1944 strong representations were made before the committee on reconstruction of the House of Commons. During the same year an economic survey of the Gaspé peninsula had been made, and a report was prepared which was later published in the leading Quebec newspapers, such as *Le Soleil* of Quebec, which had sponsored the survey; *La Tribune* of Sherbrooke, and *Le Nouveliste* of Three Rivers. Later this survey report, which makes excellent and informative reading, was published in a book, a perusal of which I strongly recommend to those who are interested in this problem. Both in this book and in the report to the committee on reconstruction, the purchase of the Mont Joli to Matane railway line from the Canada and Gulf Terminal Railway by the Canadian

National was recommended, and also the extension of this line along the coast to Ste. Anne des Monts, and thence via the interior of the peninsula to the magnificent port of Gaspé. This recommendation was supported by La Chambre de Commerce de Matane and the federal and provincial representatives of Gaspé, Bonaventure and Matapédia-Matane. As everyone can now see, it is part of this suggestion that I have unceasingly requested the government to implement since my election to this House of Commons in 1945, and it is part of the same suggestion which the members of La Chambre de Commerce de Gaspé-Nord were strongly supporting when they came to Ottawa last year.

On August 11, 1946, at its regional congress held at Ste. Anne des Monts, La Chambre de Commerce du Bas St.-Laurent passed a resolution strongly urging the Canadian government to implement this unanimously approved petition. I forwarded a copy of this resolution to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Chevrier). At this stage of my remarks I believe it is in order to read a translated excerpt from a letter addressed to Hon. J. E. Michaud, then minister of transport, under date of June 20, 1944, by Hon. G. E. Dansereau, minister of public works in the Quebec government. It reads as follows:

Dear Mr. Michaud:

My colleague, Hon. M. Perrault Casgrain, sent me a copy of the brief which is to be presented to the committee on reconstruction of the House of Commons relative to the improvement of communication facilities in the Gaspé peninsula. I take the liberty of forwarding herewith copy of this brief.

You will surely concur in my view that the existing railroad facilities are not proportionate to the needs of this region, and I fully approve the proposed solution to this problem, that is, the construction of a new railway line from Matane to Gaspé, or the purchase of the Canada and Gulf Terminal Railway and the extension of this line to Gaspé via Ste. Anne des Monts. We must prepare for the post-war period, and, as my colleague the Hon. Mr. Casgrain stated, the development of the Gaspé region will not normally occur if appropriate commercial avenues are not placed at the disposal of its population.

Late in 1947 the Canada and Gulf Terminal Railway was sold to Canadian interests represented by the Hon. J. A. Brillant of Rimouski.

I wish to give now a brief description of the region concerned.

The distance between Ste. Anne des Monts and Matane is approximately fifty-seven miles by road. The topography does not present any obstruction to the construction of the extension of this line, the cost of which should be close to the average for such a line. Most of the population is located along the highway closely following the coast and linking Ste.