

Newfoundland Ferry Service

and to the government if they see fit to reduce the fares as I have suggested, bringing them in line with the cost to other Canadians of travelling a similar distance.

Mr. Maurice A. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): Madam Speaker, I agree with the sentiments expressed in this motion and I realize the inadequacy of the kind of transportation to which the hon. member refers. It surely must be recognized by all members of parliament that transportation has always been, and still is, a major concern of all the Atlantic provinces. We lag far behind the rest of the country, the far north excepted, in all forms of transportation—that is, air, highway, rail and water.

Thanks to the recognition of this problem by the federal government, the Atlantic provinces now have their sections of the trans-Canada highway. But this is only one route and it is obvious that these small provinces with small populations, and an even smaller industrial base, cannot build and maintain the kind of arterial highways which modern transportation systems require.

● (1610)

Hence the federal government will have to continue to assist, through such financial arrangements, the continued development of a modern system of highways in Atlantic Canada. The national railway, the CNR, seems to be and has been for years on a deliberate course of making rail transport as expensive and as difficult as possible. Nowadays it may cost more to send a single package by CN than the contents thereof are worth. And unless the article has a very long life span it will be obsolete, rotten, or dead, before it reaches its destination. If indeed it escapes all the aforementioned fates, it is liable to be bent, spindled or mutilated beyond recognition.

I might point out that very often by CN rail it takes freight at least two weeks to travel from Montreal to northeastern New Brunswick. A good deal of this delay is due to inefficiency and over-haul, whereby cargo is hauled beyond its destination, stored in a warehouse, and then hauled back again.

In the field of passenger service the railways have had even greater success in their aims and objectives than in freight and express. The trains normally run late; they are uncomfortable and slow. The officials are often indifferent or even discourteous, and unless one is a millionaire it is necessary to carry one's lunch along. Maintenance is inadequate, both on the roadbed and the rails, judging from the frequent derailments experienced in Atlantic Canada.

Air service as well leaves a great deal to be desired. The national carrier obviously gives thought to Atlantic Canada only as an afterthought. The service of the regional carrier, Eastern Provincial Airways, is much, much more personalized service than the national carrier, but its scheduling requires a great deal more thought and imagination. It does little good to substitute a slow daily plane for an occasional fast one that comes in only occasionally.

You, may well ask Madam Speaker, what all this has to do with the motion we are now discussing. The answer, of course, is that I am trying to put this problem in context vis-à-vis the entire problem of transportation in Atlantic Canada.

[Mr. Carter.]

Obviously the most unsatisfactory form of transportation by its very nature is ferry service. But the government of Canada has invested a great deal in providing better ferry service between Newfoundland and the mainland, and between Prince Edward Island and the mainland. Having said that, I sympathize with the sentiments behind this motion. I must ask, however, whether its implementation would not have the effect of cutting off one's nose to spite one's face.

Can one logically expect, in view of the present high subsidies, to lower fares substantially and at the same time increase service? I would suggest, however, that a look should be taken at the rate structure. It might be well to base the charge on a flat rate for a car and all of its occupants, so that families will not be penalized unduly. Does it cost more to transport a family of six than a family of four? In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I cannot support this motion because its net effect would be to create yet another disparity in Atlantic Canada.

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to support the motion of my colleague, the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Carter), who has presented an excellent case. He is indeed an excellent member. He is a diligent, thoughtful and far-seeing member of this place. He has, with his usual realism and precision, zeroed in upon one of the greatest issues which troubles our region, and indeed our nation because the land is not prosperous if any region thereof is lacking in prosperity. He is dealing with an issue of national importance.

It is appropriate that he and I should be discussing it because, in a sense, we are both from islands, although I think Prince Edward Island is the only island province because the great Labrador mainland is part of the province to which my colleague belongs. In another way I suppose that might be said because in my province, in the constituency which I represent, Canada began. The 1864 cradle of Confederation conference was located in Charlottetown, and Newfoundland so far is where Confederation has ended.

I am not saying that Confederation with Newfoundland brought the thing to an end, but this is the last expansion so far, unless the Turks and Caicos Islands join us, and other adventurous developments in the south take place in God's good time. It is tremendously important that we deal with transportation as our ancestors in this chamber from the maritimes have had to do, because by a fine, enlightened, considerate, sensitive policy the national government can do something to offset the economic imbalances which came upon our region because of Confederation.

In the days before there was the great union in the 1860's the people in my part of Canada and the people in Newfoundland were well located in terms of the economic factors of importance. They were in a good position for trade. The Atlantic was a corridor of commerce and their location, their marine centred economy and their initiative brought for them a degree of prosperity which they have never attained since, relative to other parts of North America.