

*Supply—Public Works*

and that everybody down there was very happy about the situation. That is not the way one reads it, in the press anyway. The reason I mention Argentina is that I noticed in the *Ottawa Citizen* of the 11th of this month a report that the Newfoundland fisheries minister said in the legislature that he was going to lead his riding out of confederation if this ferry did not operate out of Port aux Basques and if it continues to operate out of Argentina. So apparently he is not too happy about the situation, and the minister would not say that he was a hostile critic of this government. There is the emphasis there.

One of the St. John's newspapers, the *Daily Star*, the other day commented on this whole question and this does not suggest sweetness and light. It said:

It is a mad scheme which never had an atom of common sense applied to it.

That is a fairly stringent criticism to make of matters of expenditure which have already amounted to \$21,760,000, in which you need a soothsayer with a crystal ball to tell us how much more can be spent and, even after it is spent, whether the works can be used. The other day the minister was probably trying to, shall we say, hold a cloak over other people rather than himself, in an explanation on this which, I should say, has confused the matter more than it was before.

Someone suggested—I think it was the hon. member for Broadview—that the dredging of the natural breakwater there had caused some of the difficulty. The minister indignantly repudiated that and said that that had nothing to do with it at all. Then that was qualified slightly when he told us that he was responsible for the setting up of, shall we call it, the committee of inquiry, something similar to a court martial that we would have in the army except that there was no one to shoot in this case. They set up a committee of inquiry of the Canadian National Railways and the departments of public works and transport. They retained a leading engineer from Great Britain to deal with this matter. According to the minister—though we have not the report in front of us—this engineer said the work of dredging, as I understand it, and in the words of the minister, had had no appreciable effect on the harbour. I do not know how you spell that word “appreciable”. I suggest it should be in capital letters. If you take that out it changes the context, of course. I am sure the minister would not want to imply that the dredging was useless. I am sure that what the minister must have meant was that it had no appreciable damaging effect, that

it did little appreciable damage to the harbour, because if you take the other interpretation the whole expenditure was wasted. When a particularly experienced engineer is retained by this government to come over and meet this committee and consider the matter, I think that is the most stringent statement one could expect.

As I said, how do you spell that word “appreciable”, and what do you mean by “effect”? If you mean damage, that is an admission. Perhaps the St. John's newspaper to which I referred said, “Thank God, you have not destroyed the harbour entirely.” Although it was a slightly euphemistic and perhaps apocryphal one, yet perhaps it was not too far out of the way. This is the situation, Mr. Chairman, as it currently appears today. When the hon. member for Greenwood asked the minister last Friday about this committee he said that he was responsible for setting it up. He was asked why and he said it was to get all the parties together and to find out what action should be taken to provide the further protection needed to make this harbour the sort of harbour into which Canadian National Railways would wish to operate their boat. That is what the committee was set up for, to find out what action was necessary to make this harbour the sort of harbour necessary in order that the Canadian National Railways would operate this boat into the harbour.

The minister, Mr. Chairman, comes from a thrifty province. The people in his own constituency are very thrifty, cautious folk. I am sure that down there he has heard many times the maxim about locking the door after the horse is stolen. I think that is the position in which the minister now finds himself. You set up a committee to inquire what should be done to make this harbour the sort of harbour into which the C.N.R. will want to operate the boat after spending \$11,500,000 in constructing the boat—millions mean nothing in this case—and incurring total construction costs of over \$21,760,000. After all that is done you set up a committee to decide what should be done to the harbour so that the C.N.R. will finally decide to operate its boat there.

If there is a more fantastic story than that I should like to hear it. The minister's explanation the other day to the hon. member for Broadview, an explanation in which, as I said, the minister was possibly trying to defend someone else, was that the dredging had nothing to do with it. Then what did cause this fiasco? Surely we are not dealing with imbeciles. Surely we know that the experts of the civil service are all trained and able men. But we are now faced with the