

Oral Questions

Hon. Jean Marchand (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I think I have answered this question three times. I believe that Premier Campbell wrote to the Prime Minister on this matter. At the same time, we have to consider the right of the employees.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): It is the law of the land that they have the right to strike. If hon. members want to remove that right, O.K.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. A number of hon. members are seeking supplementaries. I would hope we could try to move to another subject.

MEASURES TO CLEAR UP BACKLOG OF FREIGHT CARS AT NORTH SYDNEY DESTINED TO NEWFOUNDLAND

Mr. Walter C. Carter (St. John's West): Mr. Speaker, my question is supplementary to those asked earlier by the hon. member for Gander-Twillingate and the hon. member for St. John's East. In view of the fact that responsibility for providing the link between Newfoundland and the Canadian mainland rests with the Canadian government, as agreed to in the terms of union, will the minister undertake to provide further ships if Canadian National is unable to clear up the backlog of freight cars? Will he agree to have additional ships moved in to help alleviate the situation?

Hon. Jean Marchand (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I will ask for a full report on this from Canadian National and my department. I cannot say yes or no. I do not know if there are any ships available at this stage. I cannot—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Fairweather: What about the *Bonaventure*?

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): Why don't you learn to swim?

Mr. Speaker: I suggest to hon. members that the noise and fury are not very conducive to a happy and fruitful question period.

Mr. John Lundrigan (Gander-Twillingate): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a further question to the Minister of Transport. Instead of the minister asking Canadian National or sending one of his officials to discuss this matter with CN, as though they were running the country, would he be prepared to have a completely independent inquiry set up immediately through his department to investigate the aspects of the terms of union referred to by the hon. member for St. John's East to see whether in fact the government has a superseding responsibility and also investigate why Newfoundland, which is part of Canada, will have its transportation links cut off for six months just because CN is not willing to put on the equipment to carry out their responsibility?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): Mr. Speaker, I am aware of this problem. I have already stated in the House we are looking into forming some kind of agency to operate the ferries so that in future it will be possible to avoid this kind of situation, which I deplore as much as any member in the House. During the strike I even applied pressure so that the ferry operations would be maintained.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Lundrigan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member rises on a question of privilege. After we have disposed or attempted to dispose of the question of privilege I will recognize the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway and the hon. member for Bellechasse.

Mr. Lundrigan: I can only attempt to dispose of my question of privilege. The east coast of this country is faced with an emergency that is damaging and ruining the first good economy we have had in years. We stand in our places today to ask questions about a situation announced today which will mean a backlog in freight until after Christmas. This has been admitted by Canadian National. We have been sincere in directing questions to the minister. He says, "why don't you learn to swim?" That is a most derogatory comment. Newfoundland is the newest part of Canada and we suffer the most severe problems of any part of Canada. The least Canada can do, through the Prime Minister and the government, is to try to respond to this emergency with some kind of leadership. The minister should rise in his place and apologize.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. As usual, I will hear the minister on the hon. member's alleged or suggested question of privilege.

Mr. Lundrigan: It is a damn shame.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member has made his speech.

[Translation]

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker, I am sad to see that, apparently, they are trying to pass censure on the government and especially the Minister of Transport for a situation they could not prevent, the union leaders and railway company officials having agreed to maintain the ferries in operation even during the strike. The service was discontinued because the strikers disregarded their union leaders' instructions. Therefore, I am not to blame for that. At that time, we did everything we could and shall strive to prevent any repetition of this; that is, we shall work towards the maintenance of a normal situation.