

Supply—Transport

Some determined effort should be made to secure an increase in passenger service. By proper advertising I am sure many more people could be induced to take this step. I am convinced we could get many more excursions to pass over the route. No effort has been made to increase these excursions. I took a trip not long ago on one of these boats, and was shocked by the situation on the other side. A person has to climb one hundred steps in order to go from the ferry to the city of Rochester. In view of the great difficulty this occasions even a healthy person, one can see that it would be absolutely impossible for either an invalid or an aged person to climb these stairs.

There should be better service for the transportation of automobiles, and I am sure if this were developed it would be a source of great remuneration to the company.

Then, if there is insufficient business for two boats, why not proceed with one. This would cut down operating costs and should make possible the economic operation of the service.

In brief, I believe I have set out the present situation of the Ontario Car Ferry Company. I would urge upon the minister that he consider my representations, and before approving any decisions by the Canadian National Railways to discontinue this service, if at any time in the future such decision should be made, that he refer the whole matter to the board of transport commissioners for investigation.

I base my request upon the following reasons:

1. Because of the discrepancy in figures concerning the deficit of the Ontario Car Ferry Company, as supplied from various sources.

2. Because there is no organized system to secure business for the Ontario Car Ferry Company. The only agents trying to find business for the company are those of the Canadian National Railways; and it is my opinion that they give to the ferry company only that business which they cannot handle themselves.

3. In view of the statement of the vice-president that the two parent companies could make this company pay, if they wished, then I say it is reasonable to conclude that possibly at the present time there is some effort to take business from the Ontario Car Ferry Company and this situation should be fully investigated before any decision is handed down in this regard.

4. In view of the appointment of Mr. Donald Gordon as president of the Canadian National Railways, and his taking office on January 1, I do not believe that now is the proper time to take such a radical course as that of discontinuing the service.

[Mr. Robertson.]

May I at this time thank the minister for his courtesy to me in arranging a meeting of my delegation with officials of the Canadian National Railways. He has been a great help to me in this regard. I would ask him to make sure that all phases of the operation of this service are looked into before the ferries cease operation.

Mr. Chevrier: Mr. Chairman, I do not like the record to become encumbered with a number of questions which have not been answered. With that in mind I shall attempt to answer the questions of the senior member for Halifax and the hon. member for Northumberland.

The hon. member for Halifax raised the subject of the shipping policy of the government, and the present position in regard to the Canadian merchant navy. This is an important problem because at the moment the position is, I must admit, quite serious in many respects. This is due to a number of causes which I have already stated in the house. First there is the matter of increased cost of operation and construction of ships. The next is the lack of freight and the deterioration in freight rates; and the last, but not the least, is the effect of devaluation.

The operating cost of a Canadian flagship is the second highest in the world. The United States daily operating costs, exclusive of fuel oil and depreciation, amount to \$972.52; the Canadian costs come second with \$810.50; and those of the United Kingdom, the sixth highest in a list of nine countries, stand at \$525.46. The lowest of all costs are those of Italy where it is \$421.71.

Mr. Green: What are the Norwegian and Swedish costs?

Mr. Chevrier: I shall get those in a moment. The cost of constructing a United Kingdom ship is 25 per cent less than that of a Canadian ship. That is a serious condition which Canadian flag ship operators have had to deal with and meet. I referred to the decline in cargoes all over the world. That is a condition which is not peculiar to Canada alone. There are some 118 ships in our own fleet and at the moment 23 have been laid up. The United States have laid up 2,050 war-built ships.

Mr. Isnor: Out of how many?

Mr. Chevrier: There are 323 chartered United States vessels still operating, but whether the total is the addition of those two figures, I am not able to say. I am informed that there are about 250,000 deadweight tons under European flags and about 1,600,000 deadweight tons under North and South American flags which are at present demobilized. Those include 75 Greek-owned vessels. My latest