

*Marine Atlantic Inc.*

captive to the cost-recovery mentality of the present Government, as they were to that of the previous administration. I do not deny that the previous Government was moving in that direction, but the present Government seems to be moving much faster.

Even with the subsidy that is in place to offset the costs, and even though the report published under the name of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Nielsen) suggests very strongly that the amount of subsidy should be reduced and the cost for the user should be increased, the reality is that residents of the two island provinces in Atlantic Canada are treated very differently than the rest of us in Canada. We do not have to pay a user fee to use the TransCanada Highway. We pay through income tax and gasoline taxes for the maintenance and operation, but there is no toll booth in northern Ontario. There is no longer a toll booth in northern Quebec. We have had toll booths in Atlantic Canada for too long.

I know that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Forrestall), who comes from Atlantic Canada, has a very strong position on this particular issue. People from his area are being taxed at a third level for transportation. They must pay a fee to travel by ferry or to transport goods from one area to another.

When we reach clause-by-clause deliberation I will move an amendment to the appropriate clause which, if adopted, would call on Maine Atlantic Inc., and therefore the Government of Canada, to treat the ferry service in Atlantic Canada as an extension of the TransCanada Highway with the corresponding fee structure. Thereby all Canadian taxpayers who contribute to the cost of running the country through work and investment will say that we should give our Atlantic Canadian neighbours the same rights as they have, the right to free surface transport in the nation's transportation system. I think it would be very appropriate for Members on the other side of the House to give consideration to the acceptance of that motion, should it be deemed appropriate under our rules. If it is not, I would encourage the Parliamentary Secretary to take that suggestion to the Minister.

Each year 2.3 million passengers and nearly 1 million vehicles use the services of Marine Atlantic Inc. If one did a traffic count in my community of Thunder Bay one might find similar figures—and perhaps higher. However, the important thing is that they must have the same kind of unrestricted access. I think the Government should remove the fee entirely and pay for the services out of general revenues.

● (1200)

I want now to deal with a couple of other areas regarding this Bill. One is not directly related to the Bill but is tied to the fee structure. We had extensive hearings this winter on a Bill which would give the Minister of Transport (Mr. Mazankowski) the power to impose fees for certain Coast Guard services. We had representations from Atlantic Canada. One of the concerns they raised was that the Bill C-75 would give the Canadian Coast Guard the power to charge for ice-breaking

services. We were told by people in Atlantic Canada that for a great part of the year the ferries owned by Marine Atlantic Inc. must use the ice-breaking services of the Canadian Coast Guard. Under that Bill the cost of those services, which could amount to as much as \$30,000 a trip, could be passed on in whole or in part to Marine Atlantic Inc.

Their alternative, unless the Government was prepared to accept the concept that there should be no tolls or fees to get on the ferry, was that the users were going to have to pay. We were then going to have yet another increase in the cost of using the ferries. Fewer and fewer people will be able to afford to take those trips. For Prince Edward Island the cost of moving its produce, potatoes in particular, will be even more expensive than it is today. How many more potato producers are we going to put out of work? How many more potatoes will we end up bringing in from offshore?

Instead of putting all these road-blocks in the path of Canadians, we in this Parliament should be working to remove them. We should, if you like, be deregulating the financial aspect of cost recovery. We need efficiencies of scale. We need to ensure that we provide the service without penalizing the people concerned.

One of my concerns is that we set up Marine Atlantic Inc. by statute, and if at some point in time the Government felt it was appropriate to dispose of the assets of that company, in other words to privatize it, the Government would have to come back to this House to get permission to do so. There would be a full public debate on the disposition of Marine Atlantic, which is not the case with CN Trucking and some other Crown corporations, which this Conservative Government in its blind belief in the private sector has chosen to privatize.

Therefore I encourage the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport to give us a clear statement in this House on this before we get into clause-by-clause study. He should indicate that under the terms of this legislation the Government of Canada must return to this House for permission to dispose of those assets.

I now want to talk about the employees of what was CN Marine and is now Marine Atlantic Inc. Over 2,500 people work for this Crown corporation. Obviously if you are going to carve a new Crown corporation out of an old Crown corporation, issues like pensions and pension credits and fringe benefit packages, some of which have been system-wide across CN, have to be dealt with. We must ensure that the employees are fully protected. The benefit of the doubt should be given to them, not automatically to the company. When we fragment organizations like CN there is a belief by some people that it becomes an excuse to do some labour bashing. Carve them into a smaller unit and we can get at them.

In another part of the marine sector over this past week we have seen a thousand workers forced to leave their jobs because of the way in which Treasury Board has been handling negotiations. Those negotiations went to conciliation. There