

*Proceedings on Adjournment Motion*

extension at least gives a breathing spell to the people involved who were facing the prospect of imminent withdrawal of the only practicable means of having essential supplies delivered to their communities. Hopefully, it also means there will be an opportunity for rational public discussion of the whole complex question of transportation for people and goods to and from the communities scattered along Vancouver Island's rugged west coast.

There are, I feel, certain facts related to what I can only term as this near disaster which should be brought out at this point. First of all, I want to make it clear that existing transportation by any and all of the means now available is unsatisfactory, or costly, or both. Second, in-camera communications between the federal government, the provincial government and those engaged in the transportation business about something which so vitally affects the lives and the future of so many citizens is simply not good enough. On matters of this kind, people simply should not be left in the dark. Nor should it be left so the people's elected representative hears about it more or less accidentally at the eleventh hour.

At this point I am not seeking to lay the blame on any particular quarter. I recognize that the water transport committee of the CTC has not the kind of statutory mandate to require public notice and to order public hearings, as has the railway transport committee in connection with proposed changes in railway services. I have argued this point many times on the floor of this House; I have introduced amending bills, but to no avail. The people on the Pacific coast dependent on water transport have continued to be left at the mercy of what operating firms conceive to be an economic opportunity for themselves, or to the good graces of what the water transport committee or the provincial authorities decided in private were necessary subsidies.

The third point I would like to make is that constitutionally, under the British North America Act, the federal responsibility is for transportation which is interprovincial. Transportation which is entirely within a province is a provincial government responsibility. This does not, however, gainsay the fact that historically, for reasons many of which may now be lost in the mist of time, the federal government has accepted a responsibility for support of transportation services, particularly with reference to shipping services which are intraprovincial. This is certainly true with respect to the west coast of Vancouver Island where continuous support of this kind has been provided going back beyond the memory of most people now living; certainly back to the days of the good ship *Maquinna* whose name is still a byword among old-timers on the west coast. Abrupt withdrawal of such support without any public notice is, in my view, unjustifiable.

The fourth point I would like to make to try to keep the record straight is that the proposal of the federal authorities, which was to have taken effect on December 31 and which I understand was made known to the government of the province about a year ago, provided for an increase in the total amount which the federal government would commit to the support of water transportation on the British Columbia coast, with the proviso that it was all to be concentrated on improving and expanding the services to the northern coast and the Queen Charlotte Islands.

This, of course, is cold comfort to the people on Vancouver Island who, as matters stood on December 8, were being left completely stranded with neither federal nor provincial governments prepared to accept any responsibility.

I am happy that in the face of this situation the minister and the Canadian Transport Commission were prepared to listen to the cold, hard facts which I and some of my constituents presented to them without any histrionics or shouting and agreed to a six months' reprieve. This to me is an example of a sensible argument being sensibly listened to. The results would indicate that in this case at least it was more effective than wild and irresponsible shouting.

If the minister of municipal affairs for British Columbia was correctly quoted in the press as saying, "There will be no operating federal subsidies whatsoever on the west coast, but on the east coast they will continue", he was making a wild and irresponsible statement, not in accordance with the facts, about which he must or should have known as a minister of the provincial government. The pedalling of this sort of irresponsible propaganda, which seems to issue in an almost endless stream from this minister's mouth, does nothing to help solve the problems of the Canadian people, either local or national.

I hope the British Columbia minister more immediately responsible for dealing with transportation matters will not take the same line during the next six months, but will be prepared to discuss rationally the whole complex question of adequate transportation, at reasonable cost, for the people who dwell in the communities along Vancouver Island's west coast.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gérard Duquet (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport):** Mr. Speaker, I am aware of the interest the hon. member for Comox-Alberni has in subsidies to transportation services on Vancouver Island.

Last November 30th, as can be seen on page 10,004 of *Hansard*, the hon. member for Comox-Alberni asked the hon. Minister of Transport the same question concerning subsidies to coastal ship services in Canada, with particular reference to the service on the west coast of Vancouver Island.

In his reply, the Minister of Transport explained that it might be possible to remedy the situation described by the hon. member through an extension of the service, if the hon. member's description of the situation was accurate.

However, the minister pointed out that the decision rested entirely with the CTC.

In answer to a second question asked by the hon. member on December 8 on the same subject, the Minister told him about the successful outcome of his intervention with the Canadian Transport Commission and about the fact that the Commission had agreed to extend the subsidies for a period of six months.

I believe discussions are now in progress between the Transport Commission and the owners of the ferry service with a view to reaching a satisfactory solution in the interest of all concerned.

I trust this information will prove satisfactory to the hon. member.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.23 p.m.