

Government Orders

most beautiful islands in the world, and I have seen a good many countries.

• (1140)

But I question the job creation aspect of that project. In the medium term, it will certainly create jobs, but in the long term, there will be job losses considering that each year some 400 persons work on the ferry and in five years those 400 jobs will be reduced to about 50. Did he study that aspect of the issue? What alternative does he propose? Did he consult the unions?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I know the Secretary of State for Parliamentary Affairs has found the 10-minute period too short. I simply want to remind him that the question and comments period is still shorter. Therefore we would appreciate a brief comment.

Mr. Robichaud: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the members from the other side for supporting this amendment and also for supporting the project as a whole.

Unfortunately, as the member mentioned, some of those now working for the ferry system, maybe I should say many of them, will not find a job on the bridge.

As I mentioned during my speech, Marine Atlantic, the company which operates the ferry system, has already contacted the unions in order to find ways to minimize the impact of the bridge opening and help those people find other jobs.

Of course, local communities and economic commissions are trying to develop tourism and that could create jobs for the ferry workers of today. But I can assure you that every effort will be made to help these people adapt to the new situation so that they can find other jobs.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, even though we basically agree with the government, our comments in this House prove that its approach differs vastly from the one members on this side would use.

Regardless of whether we support this project or not, we are concerned by its potential impact on the environment. It seems to me, at first glance anyway, that the government is not very well equipped at this point to answer the many questions and solve the numerous problems which might arise from the project in front of us.

First of all, I must say that after listening this morning to the minister, I was rather shocked to hear that he had assumed, even before being aware of our position on the matter, that the Official Opposition would oppose this project, at least, that is the impression he gave in his argument. It is rather odd. I wonder how he came to the conclusion, even before we had a chance to express our views on the topic, even before the beginning of this debate, that we would oppose this project.

He may have forgotten, or perhaps he never listened to the Official Opposition when we pledged to Canadians that equity and fairness in distribution would be the yardsticks by which we would measure proposals submitted to this House. The minister might have forgotten that, unless he just never was aware of it. Let us give him the benefit of the doubt, but let it be a lesson for him in the future. The minister should never again presume to think for the Official Opposition, especially given the fact that he seems to have enough trouble trying to understand the issues he is presenting to this House. He does not have all the answers, he has to do more work on these issues, and he should get on with it. The opposition will do its job, and the minister should do his.

• (1145)

I must say I was pleasantly surprised when I heard our friends opposite say they have the greatest respect for the results of a referendum held in Prince Edward Island that revealed that the citizens of this province were very interested in the project, were very much in favour of it and considered it a major step forward. I think respect for the will of the people as expressed in a referendum is very important, and I would remind our hon. friends opposite that this should apply to all referendums that may be held in this country and that may have important consequences for the future of its communities.

My own major concern is for the environment. I understand the reasons for the project, and I support it, and I understand what it means to the people of Prince Edward Island, but I have some very real reservations, especially in connection with the issue of ice formation. I am not an expert, but I am told that a major accumulation of ice near the bridge at certain times of the year might alter the ecology of the area and possibly have a major impact on the fisheries. I believe the government has recognized this by providing, if I am not mistaken, a \$10 million relief plan to help fishermen who work in the area make the transition to other work. This means the government is aware of a significant impact on the fisheries.

I am one of those who are very concerned about this kind of situation, and I would have liked to see the environmental issues researched more thoroughly. I am concerned. I know that one case has already been brought before the courts. A number of rulings have been handed down, and the court has had a second chance to rule on the quality of the environmental studies. But I must say that a project of this scope, which may have a very significant impact—and one does not have to be an environmental expert to understand this—it seems to me that the whole environmental question should have been researched more carefully in order to get more answers and more clarification. I still have a number of questions about this project. There are definitely negative sides that will affect the future of a number of fishermen. There may be a negative impact on climate and