

Newfoundland Ferry Service

ally subsidized, the people of the province being forced to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to support the system. Anyone looking at the map will realize that those travelling from Vancouver Island or the Queen Charlotte Islands to the mainland must cover a fair distance over water, in the same way as those travelling from Newfoundland to the mainland must cover a fair distance of water. Clearly, coastal transportation is an area of difficulty in this country.

The government talks of uniting the country. Madam Speaker, the longer we take to cure our inequities in transportation, the higher will become the mountains of British Columbia! I know the province is not separated from the rest of the country by water, as is Newfoundland. That fact is incidental and unimportant. We need a rational transportation policy. Admittedly the motion before us refers to a subsidized ferry service for the east coast; let me point out that the British Columbia ferry service is not subsidized, for reasons I have never understood.

The argument that we only subsidize interprovincial ferries will not wash. The Library of Parliament study on Canadian ferry services, recently published, shows that \$51.8 million was spent on subsidizing ferry service, largely Canadian National Railways ferry service. There is also reference to the subsidy for the Tobermory and South Baymouth ferry service.

An hon. Member: Manitoulin Island is like another province.

Mr. Leggatt: That service does not cross provincial boundaries. So, the government is being inconsistent in its approach to subsidized ferry service.

Most of us in British Columbia want to discourage sentiments of separatism which lie just under the surface. Sometimes we find this difficult, especially when we learn that the government subsidizes heavily a ferry service which owns more vessels than the Canadian navy. Such subsidies are only possible because the government has adopted an inconsistent and irrational transportation policy in the many years it has mismanaged the affairs of the nation.

Mr. Cliff McIsaac (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, let me thank the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Carter) for bringing forward this motion which deals with ferry service to Newfoundland and, by implication, with ferry service to other parts of the Maritimes and other parts of Canada. The hon. member dealt with various aspects of transportation. It is in that context that we must consider this motion.

I was impressed by the comments of the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie), who has left the chamber, and by those made by the hon. member for St. John's West. I was born on the east coast and recall how important it was to get to Charlottetown harbour on time to catch the ferry. I remember the ice boats which crossed the harbour in the spring. They crossed from Prince Edward Island to New Brunswick when the larger ice-breakers, the CNR ferries, could not get through because they were caught in an ice jam. I appreciate the concern of the hon. member about ferry service to his home province.

[Mr. Leggatt.]

I am not certain that I agree with everything the hon. member for Hillsborough and the mover of the motion said. I was under the impression that they were, in a way, downgrading their provinces by saying how tough things are, all because of transportation difficulties. I am sure that they did not mean to leave the impression that they were downgrading their own provinces.

● (1650)

I am sure they do not mean it that way, but they do have a lot of other attributes on both islands. The tourist traffic and tourist industry have been building up tremendously, abetted by the ferry services that are there. The improved ferry services are another factor insofar as the economics of Newfoundland are concerned. I do not think we can look at this from one side only, with even more subsidized service than now exists.

While I appreciate the advisability of the motion from the point of the hon. member who moved it, I ask hon. members to oppose it in this particular form. I will advance some arguments on why I ask that.

I can well appreciate the hon. member's concern for service to his province. That is a legitimate and genuine concern. Indeed, it is not only a concern of his and of other members from Newfoundland, but of members from other parts of Canada. Accessibility to Newfoundland is a concern of all of us. Indeed, it was a condition of confederation. In total, it is one that has been very admirably fulfilled when compared with the situation prior to confederation.

I can recall as a boy loading produce, cattle and other things on ferries out of Charlottetown bound for Newfoundland. That ferry service is a vital link in the chain of uniting our Canadian provinces, as is the ferry service to the province of Prince Edward Island and the railroad that was built years ago across the prairies and western Canada to link the province of British Columbia to Canada. All of this points out the very vital aspect of transportation, not only to Canada today but to our development as a nation.

Every time we look at a motion like this which involves ferry service to Newfoundland, we ask why it is different from ferries that run in British Columbia, across rivers in Saskatchewan, ferries to Manitoulin Island and others. The answer is obvious on why there are variations. They were all built for different reasons, and probably at different times. It is not easy to resolve this problem with a uniform policy for all of Canada, based on local needs and traditions, and how they evolved. Those are a few of the reasons why it is difficult to come up with an equitable policy for all of Canada with regard to ferry service.

How much should we subsidize ferry service to the province of Newfoundland? How much does it cost to maintain that service? How much will it cost in the future? The figures are high. What was the capital cost of the facilities now there? They were paid for by the taxpayers of Canada. What are the present and projected operating costs? These are huge figures.

When making an examination we must look at other needs insofar as capital investment in Canada is concerned. There must be increases and improvements in our transportation service in other areas of Canada.