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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Action Urged In Case Rail Strike Is Called

By NEIL A. MATHESON
Provincial-Farm Editor

WITH TALK of a nation-wide rail strike becoming increasingly serious, I'm wondering why someone is not taking the necessary action to prevent the tying up of our carferry service at Borden, in case the strike does materialize.

The carferry service at Borden was tied up solid when the nation-wide strike was called back in late August of 1950. It came at a time when many, many tourists were trying to get their families back home in time to begin the school term. The result was a completely impossible situation at Wood Islands, where the two existing ferries were unable to handle the rush of traffic offering.

Then they had the Prince Nova, the original one, which carried 17 automobiles, and the Charles Dunning carried 25.

LOOKING BACK at the story I wrote then, I find a description of a lineup of automobiles more than one mile long. That was impressive then, particularly with the limited ferrying capacity.

Mrs. Margaret Wakelin of the Northumberland Ferries office recalls that some cars had to wait three days before they got across.

Motor vehicle traffic has increased so much now that it bears no resemblance to the traffic of 16 years ago. It's inconceivable that we should even think of allowing such a thing to happen again.

The people at Wood Islands have two ferries now, both with carrying capacity of 60 automobiles but to me at least, it's unthinkable to let the Borden ferries be tied up.

Appreciation To Ferry Staffs

IF SOME OF MY friends on the ferries are reading this, don't be misled. I'm not trying to curb your freedoms. I realize that many of you, perhaps all of you, work long hours overtime, just to see that the travelling public get ferried across when the demand is there. You get called early in the morning, sometimes before most people even think of getting up, you also work late into the night.

You chaps are entitled to any benefits a strike, or any negotiations may bring. But negotiations can be untaken with the people at the head of your union – they were carried out successfully before – so that our province and its people, and its visitors, on pleasure and business, need not suffer the inconvenience a tie-up of the ferries at Borden would entail.

Going back to 1950, I find that negotiations with the people at the top in the appropriate union released the Abegweit from the strike tie-up on the evening of August 29, so she could carry any traffic that was offering. The tie-up had started August 22.

Tie-up Prevention Seen Possible

I SUGGEST that proper negotiation would be able to prevent the tie-up of the Borden ferries this time, in the event the threatened nation-wide strike is put into effect.

Indeed I recall that the late Premier Walter Jones said early in the summer of 1950 that the ferries should be considered part of the highway system of Canada, and as such should not be subject to a strike tie-up. His suggestion was that the department of transport should take them out of control of the CNR. But this has not been done, so far as I know.

I've limited my reference to automobile and other motor traffic. But a tie-up of our big ferries means much more than that. There was a definite threat of commodity shortages here on the Island, back in 1950. There was difficulty in getting Island produce shipped. The same thing can happen this time.

Frank Storey – he's manager of the Confederation Centre complex now – was made chairman of a provincial economic advisory board set up by the government then. Their task was to find what commodities we would run short of first, and take the necessary steps to give top priority to necessities, so far as transport across the Northumberland Strait was concerned. The tie-up was indeed serious, I recall, until we got the big Abegweit back into service. A system of priorities was established for transport on the ferries.

It could be much more serious this time, despite the greatly increased carrying capacity at Wood Islands, because traffic volume is so much greater now. The 185,348 passengers and almost 66,000 motor vehicles that were ferried across the strait on the Borden-Tormentine run last month speaks for itself. I haven't got the figures for the Northumberland Ferries in the same month.

Impossible 1950 Situation Recalled

LOOKING BACK on the 1950 period, I recall vividly the completely impossible situation I saw at Wood Islands. Hundreds of cars were seeking transportation across the strait – particularly on the first few days of the strike – the visitors were understandably panicky about getting back home.

Red Cross people from the city were there to help where possible. The Junior Chamber of Commerce boys got into the act with a sound system, camp fire and entertainment. But I've often wondered since just how those people kept their composure so well through a most anxious and trying period. This is from memory, but I cannot recall that there were any toilet accommodations, except the one single unit at the wharf in the small building where Mr. MacLeod – I think his first name was Malcolm – had his office as wharfinger.

There was no waiting room with its facilities, as we have now. I was involved in the early efforts to get that waiting room provided by the federal department of transport – that was in the middle 1950's – and I believe it must have been 1958, or later when it was finally provided.

All of this is just a small part of the many things I could tell you about what happened back in 1950. It's something I suggest in all seriousness we must not let happen again.

If somebody is already at work on what I have suggested, so much the better. He has my appreciation and congratulations. If this is not the case, though, I suggest appropriate action be taken at the earliest possible time.