

Canada Shipping Act

However, Paragraph 3(2), Clause 4, provides, and I quote:

(2) Charges may be imposed pursuant to sub-section (1) in relation to any ship or vessel, regardless of whether the Canadian Coast Guard actually provides a navigational service to that particular ship or vessel.

● (1630)

I wonder if the Minister or his Parliamentary Secretary who is listening closely to my comments has grasped the full implications of that section. In other terms, the Government through this Bill not only wants to impose user fees for a service on people who would use the help and support of the Department of Transport but even where they do not use the service or the Department's help. Simply by reason of their sailing in Canadian waters would those people also have to pay those fees.

In my opinion, this clause is quite unfair, if not totally absurd. It is one thing to charge people for using a service, but quite another to want to charge people for not using it.

I therefore believe that this aspect of Clause 4 must be changed.

Another point, Mr. Speaker, that I want to call to your attention concerns the next paragraph in the bill, which can be found on page 5. This provision is totally unacceptable and I think that the Minister should take his responsibilities. Indeed, Subsection 3 of Clause 4 states the following:

Where a charge imposed pursuant to this section is not paid as provided in the regulations made under subsection (1), interest may be charged on the amount from time to time outstanding, at a rate fixed by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the users of aids to navigation, dredging, vessel traffic services, ice-breaking services and escorting services would feel much better if the Minister of Transport himself made his own recommendations to the Governor in Council.

Why would the Minister of Transport, who is in the House at this time listening to me, not take this responsibility himself? The shipping industry would feel much more comfortable if these charges were imposed by himself rather than by the Minister of Finance. I believe that the Minister should think about this.

We all know, Mr. Speaker, that there have been major cutbacks in the Department of Transport. It has to make its own contribution to the reduction of the national debt. I know that the Minister of Transport is not alone to be bled white and that many of his colleagues in other Departments also have to cut back on their expenditures.

However, I do not believe that it is wise, at a time when our shipping industry is in difficulty in Canada, to impose these additional charges notwithstanding the approval or decision of the Minister of Finance.

All these are good reasons why the bill should be hoisted for six months, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

Mr. Angus: Mr. Speaker, would the Hon. Member care to comment that Clause 4 of this Bill, while brought forward by a Conservative Government, is a continuation of long-standing policy by the former Liberal administration to impose user fees and cost recovery mandates on a number of services provided by the Government of Canada?

Mr. Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to answer my hon. colleague. The concept of user pay has been the topic of a number of debates in the past, but it has never been the subject of legislation.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Ouellet: I admit that it has been the target of much pushing by officials of the Department of Transport. I know that some of my former colleagues publicly advocated this concept. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that it was never, although it was known to be a preferred option by some of my colleagues in Cabinet, implemented as Government policy. Therefore I regret sincerely—

Mr. Mazankowski: You have difficulty saying that with a straight face.

Mr. Ouellet:—that the new Government with a new Minister of Transport has jumped so quickly on the band-wagon prevailing in some quarters and is now trying to impose such a heavy burden on the users of our very good Maritime system.

Mr. Mazankowski: Mr. Speaker, would the Hon. Member tell the House whether he believes that users should be charged any portion of the costs required to maintain the marine system and infrastructure in Canada? If so, what percentage?

Mr. Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, let me tell the Minister of Transport (Mr. Mazankowski) that if I were in his place the first thing I would insist upon is that whatever charges there may be would be presented by me, as the Minister of Transport, and they would not be imposed on me, my Department and the users by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson). That is the first element of my answer. I hope the Minister will accept my suggestion and amend the Bill accordingly to make sure that he, as Minister of Transport, will do that. After discussing the matter with his clientele, he would be in a better position to arrive at appropriate fees that could be levied in some cases.

● (1640)

In answer to the Hon. Minister, I want to tell him that in some cases I would agree with some charges, but in other cases I think it is totally irresponsible and unacceptable to charge them. Some of my colleagues, in speaking previously in this debate, indicated that because of the regional aspect and the remote areas of our country some services are given by only one client under very difficult conditions. To charge these users additional fees would be to exploit the Canadian population. In some cases the users could pass on additional charges