

Canada Ports Corporation Act

advising the Minister of Transport on regional port planning and development as they affect all types of ports. In order to bridge that gap, the bill provides for the establishment of regional advisory councils to include the chairman of each local port corporation, harbour commission and port advisory committee; that is the advisory committee of a division of the new Canada port corporation. All this will be brought together with representation from other public interests in a regional advisory council.

Mr. Nowlan: Sounds good.

Mr. Pepin: I hope it sounds good, and I am sure it will be. Each province in a region will have the right to appoint at least one member to these regional councils.

This bill deliberately maintains flexibility in defining the size and range of activities of these regional councils. We are letting it be flexible so that different regions of Canada may have slightly different regional councils, depending on the mood of the area. It is my intention, however, that these councils form an essential part of the regional and national port planning process.

Reaction to this bill is my last point. What has it been? The bill itself is the result of extensive consultation—"extensive consultation" underlined three times—for a good period of time.

Mr. Nowlan: You are impossible.

Mr. Pepin: It has been good for a good period of time, I must say. Briefs, representations and telegrams have been received from a great number of interested parties. I have a list of some of them, but I will not mention them all.

It is obvious that the bill will not satisfy everybody. Some are looking for a greater degree of autonomy; others, presumably, are looking for a lesser degree of autonomy. However, generally speaking, I think hon. members are aware that it is the general belief that reasonable compromises were struck. That is a very important sentence.

Mr. Crosby: How about labour representation?

Mr. Pepin: The provinces are not all happy with this bill, but, generally speaking, I think there is support, if not for all the clauses, at least for the intent and purpose of the bill. I was talking to Mr. Lévesque the other day after his speech in Quebec City which was partly on ports policy. Somewhat to his amazement and to the amazement of many others I said I agreed with 95 per cent of what he said. The reason was that what he had said was all in Bill C-92.

Mr. Nowlan: No.

Mr. Pepin: Oh yes. The main difficulty he has with it has to do with the selection of the people who will constitute the local port corporations. For example, he alluded to his admiration for municipal representation on these port corporations. Everybody knows this is debatable. There are cases in which there is a conflict between the objective of the municipality and the objective of the port. I will not give cases, but some of them are pretty well known. It may be that a municipal

council would like to see a park where port authorities would like to see a port facility grow, so there is quite a difference there. In any event, we can have a good discussion of the subject.

The legislation has the support of the port authority chairmen, of the National Harbours Board ports, the chairmen of the commission harbours, the Canadian Port and Harbour Association and a whole list of other institutions. One of the reasons is that most of them have worked well on the bill and have made contributions to it.

By the way, I would like to thank all those who have made a contribution, some of them members on all sides of the House. Bill C-92 goes a long way towards addressing the major weaknesses of the present system while respecting historic preferences for the existing organization and building on the strengths and the good works of the past. I am quite sure all members would be honoured to have voted in favour of this bill.

Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Dartmouth-Halifax East): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate at the second reading stage of Bill C-92. At the outset I cannot help but wonder why the minister started off on what was a very critical passage for him, such an Alice in Wonderland stage setting for this bill. It is a piece of legislation which makes legal that which has been illegal for five years. It is time to get on with the damned thing, I agree, but let the minister not stand up and tell us about the great and wonderful autonomy the bill will extend to local ports. Let him be simple and honest and say it is a first step. It should have been taken seven, eight or ten years ago. This is not the solution to the problems of the ports in this country, and the minister knows it.

He spoke about the historical record. I suppose once every 40 or 50 years the government is entitled to speak about the record with respect to ports legislation. As the minister indicated, the National Harbours Board Act was passed in 1936 as a result of the Gibbs commission report.

We have difficulties with this bill. The minister had better be aware of that, and so had the government House leader.

On June 4 in this chamber the minister casually said we were holding the bill up. We are not holding the bill up. We want this kind of legislation. It is constructive legislation, but it is what the government should have been doing over the last two years. The government has been so preoccupied with esoteric matters that it could not find time to get on with this. That is the truth of the matter. What is more important to the minister, off-track betting or ports legislation?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Forrestall: This is not a good bill in its present form. It was not a good bill seven years ago when it was first introduced, but this is a first step. The minister knows I personally want to see this bill through second reading, into committee and back into this chamber before we adjourn for the summer,