

PARK
STEAMSHIP
COMPANY

The Park Steamship Company, a crown company, was set up to control, supervise and manage merchant ships built in Canada and retained for operation under Canadian registry. Of the new merchant ships there are at present 117 ships operated by the Park Steamship Company - 87 10,000-ton cargo vessels, 18 10,000-ton tankers, eight 4,700-ton cargo vessels and four 3,600-ton tankers. All these ships bear the names of Canadian parks and have been allotted to trade routes where tonnage is required. In order to develop the Canadian shipping industry, these Park ships are allotted to Canadian shipping firms who are appointed by the Park Steamship Company as operating managers.

Hon. J.E. Michaud, minister of transport, answering a question on August 3, 1944, as to the government's post-war policy regarding the merchant marine service, told the House of Commons:

"As to a definite policy governing the future, that has not yet been determined by the government...but there is no difference of opinion as to whether Canada should retain as many of these ships as can be used for the trade of Canada. Whether our merchant marine should be operated by the government or by individuals or by private companies is another matter..."

He pointed out that with an average of 50 men required to man one of these ships, not more than 15,000 men will find employment.

"That is the utmost number we can expect to employ even if we keep our merchant marine intact, and all our ships are returned to us after the war," he said.

Although they are described as the "Fourth Arm of the Fighting Services" the fact remains that merchant seamen throughout the world are still civilians. A seaman's engagement commences the day he signs articles of agreement to join the crew of his ship and terminates the day his ship returns to its home port, whether the voyage is long or short. The seaman is then free to re-engage or to go to his home. This meant in wartime that the supply of merchant seamen at Canadian ports was uncertain and uncontrolled.

During the height of the Battle of the Atlantic, when the Canadian merchant navy suffered its heaviest casualties in both ships and personnel, the Canadian government, by order-in-council P.C. 14/3550, dated May 19, 1941, made provision for the establishment of a special branch of the Department of Transport under a director of merchant seamen for the setting up of manning pools, training facilities and for the extension of welfare facilities. This order-in-council reads in part:

"That the merchant marine, on which our seaborne commerce depends, is, under present conditions, virtually an arm of our fighting services, and the provision of merchant seamen, their training, care and protection, is essential to the proper conduct of the war, and vitally necessary to the keeping open of the sea-lanes on which the successful outcome of the present conflict so largely depends."

Another branch of the Department of Transport, under a director of merchant services, is responsible for payment of compensation for loss of effects by merchant seamen, issuing of merchant navy badges, identity certificates and medals and crosses. This branch also maintains a register of seamen. During wartime, merchant seamen face risks as great or greater than those faced by many of the personnel of the three armed services and greater than the majority of Canadians. The government felt, therefore, that they were entitled to the same kind of protection and compensation for misadventure from enemy action as is enjoyed by members of the armed forces.

Under the minister of pensions and national health, the Canadian Pension Commission is responsible for administering death and disability pensions on behalf of merchant seamen, as well as payment of detention allowances on behalf of those taken prisoner of war. The sick mariners' branch of this department is responsible for the hospitalization and treatment of sick and injured seamen.

MERCHANT
SEAMEN