

*Canada Ports Corporation Act*

● (1720)

This is one of the things which makes eastern Canada very doubtful about the benefits which can accrue to Canada as a whole from a Crown corporation's managing the ports when only the policy of the Government of Canada is in fact going to govern the ports. As I see these appointments, in view of the authority which has been extended to the minister, they will abide by, first, his policy; second, his congeniality in respect of the sale or lease of property; third, his congeniality in respect of the building of a new structure; and fourth, the congeniality and generosity—if one might also add that word—of the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) and the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston), because all of these ministers will have to give approval to any function of any consequence at any port anywhere in Canada. We do not have an independent port system. We have, instead, a policy of government which insists that it shall in fact exert absolute control over the ports of Canada through ministerial authority.

The minister, for instance, will appoint the commission which will be governing a port, but he has not given that right to the provinces. I hope he will. Perhaps he can give me as quick an answer as he gave the hon. member for Richmond-South Delta. Will the provinces have any right to appoint members to these commissions? I believe the minister has reserved this right for himself.

**Mr. Pepin:** No, they will not.

**Mr. McCain:** The minister says no. I submit it certainly is the right of at least two provinces to appoint members to these commissions because both the provinces and the municipalities within those provinces have a vested interest by virtue of financing directly—or loans to the port of Saint John, in the case of the province of New Brunswick—and they certainly should be trustees of their own fates by virtue of their own appointments to harbour commissions at ports.

**Mr. Pepin:** They will be on the regional council.

**Mr. McCain:** If it would not be asking too much, I wish the minister would say that just a little louder.

**Mr. Pepin:** The provinces will be represented on the regional council.

**Mr. McCain:** Yes, but the regional council does not govern the affairs of the province of New Brunswick except indirectly, and I think they should be directly on that board. I plead with the minister to accept that.

**Mr. Pepin:** Mr. Speaker, may I ask a question? Is it the hon. member's objective that every activity in the country should be administered by the three levels of government working on any single activity? If that is so, then the federal government should be represented on boards and committees with respect to road transportation, for example. I believe this would be a duplication of work. Is that not good reasoning?

**Mr. McCain:** Mr. Speaker, I suppose that reasoning might be applied to British Columbia, if British Columbia is prepared to accept it, but I am not prepared to accept it in New Brunswick as long as the province of New Brunswick has a direct financial commitment to the port of Saint John. I believe that does in fact entitle New Brunswick to an appointment on the board in the city of Saint John, as it does the city of Halifax, the city of Dartmouth and the provincial government of Nova Scotia with respect to the Halifax facilities. Because, as I understand it, they are the only harbour commission ports left which have liabilities. All the rest have been forgiven by the Government of Canada.

If the policy of the Government of Canada with respect to ports continues as it is, I wish to cite two examples of what can and has happened in this competitive structure when interfered with by federal policy. For instance, it seemed essential in a province in which one third of the total economy depended upon the forests, and since most of those products were being exported, that there should in fact be a forest products terminal at the port of Saint John. Because of co-operation between federal and provincial interests and users, a forest terminal facility was established. However, after that something else happened. Not only was that facility created, but there was also additional work done on other ports within competitive reach in such a fashion that instead of having all the product that was anticipated go over the wharf facility in Saint John, it will now go in at least three other directions as a result of the improvement of facilities in direct competition with the port of Saint John.

I think this is just reason why the province of New Brunswick should have a representative on that commission as well as on the regional council. The port of Saint John has no control over its own future if public ports other than those which have formerly been National Harbours Board facilities are to be brought under severe competition by public expenditures from the federal treasury at other ports of a competitive nature. This will not work because the port of Saint John can no longer function if its trade is to be taken away by improvements at other ports.

If federal policy is to continue as it has been, I think we will find the same diffusion of trade at the port of Saint John as has already occurred, because the policy of the Government of Canada was that we should not keep the frost-free facilities at the port of Saint John in good shape. In response to a request for improvements to facilities, a machine was created. It was supposed to improve the loading capability of the port. However, instead of putting the contract into the hands of people who knew what was required and had studied and tendered on the job, the contract was awarded to a firm which built a conveyor system which could not possibly work from the day it arrived in the city of Saint John. That defeated the objective of putting perishable commodities quickly aboard a vessel in the city of Saint John in all kinds of weather. That was needed, but the National Harbours Board would not do that job well. If we find ourselves again under the thumbscrews of tax by