

Supply—Transport

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): The officers were carried on up until the date of the sale by Canadian National Steamships and the appropriation for their salary is the figure I gave. Now, when the ships were sold—

Mr. Chevrier: Which was about a year ago.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): Approximately. I think it was less than a year ago. From the time of that sale, as I have indicated, the Department of Transport has been absorbing the officers as vacancies and openings have occurred in the service of the department.

Mr. Chevrier: What about the crews which numbered 2,000 to 3,000 men?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): Does the hon. member mean the striking crew?

Mr. Chevrier: Mr. Chairman, I mean the men who manned these seven or eight ships. What happened to them?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): Does my hon. friend refer to the crews who were on strike?

Mr. Chevrier: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): I have no information as to how they are engaged at present.

Mr. Spencer: I think they are probably still on strike.

Mr. Chevrier: My hon. friend does not seem to be too interested in their welfare judging from that remark.

Mr. Spencer: Why do you say that?

Mr. Chevrier: Here are men who have been without work for over two years because of the policy of the government. The government, instead of maintaining those ships in accordance with the recommendation made by the Canadian National Steamships several years ago, over a five-year period, refused to accept that recommendation and instead transferred the flag to a Panamanian country. That is what has caused all the difficulty. Several thousand men are out of work, plus the officers. I am sorry to have to challenge the answer which the minister gave me because I submit to him with deference that it is not correct. I have in my office many letters from officers of those ships who state that they have had their employment severed with the Canadian National Steamships and they have found no work in the Department of Transport.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): I did not say they had all been absorbed by the Department of Transport. I said they were being absorbed by the department as vacancies occur. That is the policy of the department.

Mr. Chevrier: That is the policy of the department but it has not worked out. That

is the point I am trying to make. Notwithstanding the fact the minister says they are being absorbed, I would like to know how many are being absorbed. First of all, I should like to know how many officers there were, how many have been absorbed and how many are left without employment at the moment?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): I recall a statement being made in this house by my colleague the Minister of Transport to the effect that eventually all of those officers would be absorbed by the Department of Transport. It is a matter of their being absorbed as vacancies in the department arise.

Mr. Chevrier: I recall that statement very well also and I have had to write your colleague, the Minister of Transport, to point out a number of cases such as I referred to earlier where there has been no absorption and where it has not been possible to find vacancies. After all, where are the vacancies going to be, if not on the ships of the Department of Transport, and there are not seven or eight ships in the Department of Transport which will require all of these officers. I am not going to insist on it now but I think we should be entitled to a statement from the Minister of Finance as to the number of officers, mates and the like, on the Canadian National Steamships who have been absorbed in the Department of Transport. I think the minister will find that there are not nearly as many as he thinks and not nearly as many as the Minister of Transport expected at the time.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): We shall be glad to obtain that information. I think I can recall to my hon. friend that there are more ships of the Department of Transport coming into commission this year and it may be that the situation in this respect will improve considerably, perhaps sooner than he thinks.

Mr. Chevrier: While I am on this subject I want to make another reference to the Canadian National Steamships. By the decision which the government made it has reduced substantially, or reduced almost to nil, the deepsea fleet of Canada. I remember what was said by the Minister of Public Works when he was on this side of the house and what he said after the 1957 election out in his constituency. He made no bones about the fact that the position of the present government certainly would not be the same as that of the former government. I want to register here a complaint only about the fact that the deep-sea ships of Canada have gone down instead of up, and the merchant fleet of our country has been decreasing notwithstanding the fact that a minister of