

Maritime Code

country. Therefore, Madam Speaker, I hope the minister, who has not yet taken part in the debate, will outline what the government's policy is with reference to a shipping policy for a trading nation like Canada.

● (1540)

I hope the minister will indicate what steps the government intends to take to make sure we are not left completely at the mercy of the great shipping cartels, and indicate what we intend to do in order to use our own materials and our own manpower to take Canadian goods in Canadian ships to the markets of the world. That is the kind of policy we want to hear enunciated by the minister. We shall listen to what he has to say with interest and with the devout hope that at last Canada is going to have a genuine shipping policy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. C.-A. Gauthier (Roberval): Madam Speaker, I will try to be brief. I must first thank the parliamentary secretary for his statement in which he quite adequately summarized the bill. I will not reveal anything new by admitting that I have not read the 84 pages that make up the bill. I am not a shipping expert and I do not even live in a coastal area as is the case with the previous speakers. Accordingly, I will merely make a few general comments to show the minister what the people of Quebec, since I am from Quebec, expect from this legislation the purpose of which is to create a Canadian maritime code. The minister must be congratulated, because this code will be the first one in Canada. At last, we will have our own Canadian maritime Code to replace the old British shipping act which was our basic legislation since the early days of Canada. I think it will amount to Canada being recognized on the seas.

But despite all the minister's good intentions, we are concerned with the matter of Canadian and foreign vessel registry. I presume that everything will be clearly stated in the act. But our main concern here is that when it comes to defining the minister's special powers to licence ships, I feel we must exercise extreme caution. The act must be quite specific so as to limit the extraordinary powers given the minister. I note that every time we enact some legislation, there is at the end a provision to the effect that the minister will decide in special cases. Too often special cases become the general situation. There are good ministers, and I have no misgivings about the present one, but although ministers change the act remains. We are left with the same permissive statute whereby the minister might act against the interest of Canadian shipping. This is why I wanted to draw the minister's attention so this may be adequately debated in committee, in order that the door is not open to ministers to grant licences in "special" cases.

There is a second question of interest to every Canadian, that is merchant shipping. We are establishing a shipping code, but this is by no means establishing a merchant navy. I remember after World War II, there had been perforce a shipbuilding boom and at a certain time we had some kind of a merchant navy we could call Canadian, although it was not entirely under Canadian registry. But since that time, I believe things have deteriorated to the point that our shipping is on the verge of disappearing, as other

[Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands).]

members said before me. We have almost no more merchant ships and I wonder where the blame lies? Was there a lack of ship owners, of men interested in helping Canada have its own merchant navy, or have there been a government that did not do the effort needed to maintain and upgrade such a merchant navy?

I believe that is where the problem lies. As a matter of fact, I have been reading for years about the regressing of our merchant marine. On the other hand, our government has offered subsidies to foreign countries to come in our province in our country, to build merchant ships, because, they said, they needed to ensure a livelihood for our workers.

● (1550)

I believe that this was done with good intentions, namely to provide work, but in my opinion it was temporary work. There is a Chinese saying to the effect that if you want to help someone for a day, you must give him something to eat, but if you want to help him for the rest of his life, you must show him how to fish. With this in mind, I feel that the government would have been better advised to use this money in providing wages for our workers and guaranteeing them. This would have enabled Canada to win its own vessels, to have today a merchant marine which could meet at least 50 per cent of our requirements. Instead, millions and even billions of dollars were used to promote foreign companies while Canadians were neglected, they who could have created something for Canada, something which we now have to create.

As the previous speaker said earlier, we shall depend and we now depend on foreign monopolies for our shipping trade. We shall suffer the consequences of this situation. This has been the case for some years already. Foreign companies will set their own rates and tomorrow they will rule the seas. Transportation is increasingly becoming monopolistic. If the government does not change its mind and say it is essential to set up our own merchant marine, I believe, Madam Speaker, even with a good Maritime Code, the Canadian economy will gain nothing.

I mention this to attract the attention of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) so that we may discuss this matter seriously when the bill is referred to the standing committee. If we cannot guarantee that Canada will have its own merchant marine in the years to come, it is useless to waste our time passing such bills. Once again, I hope that we shall take a step forward and that work will go on. I should like to add just a few words to draw the minister's attention to the issue of the environment and sea pollution.

Because the Canadian government was not motivated enough, because it has no merchant marine, it was not interested enough in supervising our territorial waters. I trust this legislation will be severe enough towards the polluters of our waters to oblige them to clean them up. Some ships come through our waters, pollute them, to oblige them to clean them up. Some ships come through our waters, pollute them, then leave it up to the government to clean up behind them.

I do hope this act will be severe enough to make the owners whose ships pollute our waters responsible for cleaning them up, and force them to clean up the mess when they have been proved responsible for the pollution.