

# Prince Rupert versus American Ports

**Important Effects Which Will Flow from the Order-in-Council Concerning Free Ports for Fish Discussed by the Pacific Fisherman of Seattle.**

The citizens of American Pacific fishing ports have been rudely awakened by the publication of a Canadian order-in-council throwing open the ports of British Columbia to American fishing vessels and seeking their patronage in a series of epoch-making concessions. The formal language of the document, testifying its intention of inducing our fishermen to "transfer their base of operations from Seattle to Prince Rupert and . . . later transfer their vessels or boats to Canadian registry and permanently operate from Prince Rupert," brought home with a shock to the general public what the fishermen have anticipated for months.

That dominant Canadian interests had determined to make Prince Rupert the leading deep-sea fishing port of the Pacific Coast was quite apparent to any intelligent observer following the course of events in British Columbia during the past five years. All of the acts of the Canadian Government touching on this matter point like arrows to the order-in-council with which they were crowned. They are well worth citing as a splendid example of logical progression and do not suffer by comparison with any native instance of "Yankee" shrewdness.

The successive steps by which the Canadian Government has placed Prince Rupert in a position to offer effective competition to the American ports which have enjoyed this business for years are as follows: The construction of a railroad linking the proposed fisheries centre to American markets was made possible by subsidizing every mile of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. In order that the opening of the new road might find the new port provided with ample facilities for handling the fisheries business which was to be created, the Government extended a subsidy of \$80,000 to a private corporation which undertook the construction at Prince Rupert of one of the largest fisheries cold storage in the world. That the cost of operation in Canadian waters might not militate against the plan, the Government then waived the duty on distillate when used for fuel on fishing vessels, this amounting to a subsidy of 2½ cents per gallon consumed. On December 10, 1914, the Privy Council passed an order permitting fishing vessels registered in the United States to land fresh fish in any of the ports of British Columbia duty free, when shipped in bond from such port to the United States. This bonding privilege had really been in force for some years, as is evidenced by the operations of the New England Fish Company at Vancouver, but on March 9 this order was so amended as to arrange for the licensing of special dealers who were authorized to buy the catches of American fishing vessels, combine them into carload lots, and ship the same in bond to the United States, which had not previously been allowed. In brief, the Government founded the port, built a railroad to it, constructed a cold storage plant to handle the business, waived all customs regulations hampering it, and through the licensing of dealers arranged for financing the operations of the vessels which were to be attracted there.

The various phases of this plan have been commented on from time to time in the columns of the Pacific Fisherman as they developed, and even when these articles were widely copied, as was the case last fall, the public received them not only with inaction, but with incredulity. This is probably traceable to that fixed impression of the industry, germinated by a certain irresponsible element, which pictures our fishing industry only as a fugitive flying from justice, and which could not realize that this same industry might be courted assiduously by a foreign power. When the Canadian Fish & Cold Storage Company announced its intention of constructing a fisheries cold storage at Prince Rupert the Canadian people unhesitatingly donated \$80,000 to the enterprise. If in 1908, when James and William Calvert undertook the construction of a fisheries cold storage of record size at Seattle, they had sought public assistance on the ground that their plant would serve to establish Seattle as a fisheries center, they would have been only derided for their presumption. Yet these two cases are to all intents parallel, and they constitute an interesting commentary on the different estimates of the worth of the fishing industry to be found on the two sides of the border.

As soon as the attitude of the Canadian Government in the matter of Prince Rupert began to really dawn upon the general business interests of American Pacific fishing ports early this year a campaign was launched for a restoration of the duty on fish. The Pacific Fisherman does not in the least decry the general public advantages of a protective fisheries tariff. We believe in anything and everything which will serve to foster and develop the commercial fisheries, hastening the advent of the day when the true importance of the industry will be universally recognized. We do, however, seriously question whether the restoration of the duty is an adequate solution of the Prince Rupert question from the American point of view.

A careful survey of the facts in hand will show that if this business is transferred to Prince Rupert it will thrive, not on the absence of a duty, but on the privilege of bonding the fish through Canadian territory. Fish caught upon the high seas by American fishing vessels are American fish, whether brought direct to American ports or landed in a foreign port. As American fish they would be entitled to free entry, whether we had levied a duty on fish or not.

The only other step open along this line would be to seek a cancellation of the bonding privilege, and it is entirely improbable that our Government would do this, as there are other lines of trade in which the existence of this system of bonding is of undisputed advantage to American commercial interests. Furthermore, a broad action of this character would simply invite Canadian retaliation.

We must not lose sight of the fact that by the exercise of considerable forethought, by a large expenditure of money and preparations covering a period of many years, Canada has in thus capitalizing a natural advantage succeeded in offering to our fishermen advantages such as they cannot enjoy at home. She has placed her ports in direct competition with our own and has invited the fishermen to choose. This is competition, shrewd, effective, and well timed, but thoroughly honest, and when we are offered