

Canada Shipping Act

I am one of those people who, as mariners, have had to seek medical attention in foreign countries. I was always treated with courtesy by the country in which I sought it. There was never any question of the administrative processing of the cost, and no difficulty whatsoever. But now we have this government asking this chamber to approve the unilateral step in proposed new section 298A, which reads:

The owner of every ship that is not a Canadian ship is liable for the cost of all medical and surgical treatment and hospital care provided in Canada to a person employed by him on that ship.

The question may have come up in committee, and I apologize if it was dealt with there, but to the best of my knowledge nowhere has the question of reciprocal action by countries in which Canadian ships find themselves from time to time been mentioned. It is true that in 1970 we do not have the mercantile fleet that we had 10 or 15 years ago, but that does not mean that Canada could not have merchant shipping in the future or that in the future this would not be a widespread and serious problem.

The second point I wish to make is to express amazement that we have amendments of this nature in front of us, particularly when the government is going to withdraw from this area totally. Why do they come before us? Is it because the government has nothing better to bring before us? Is this a priority when there are Canadians starving to death, when there is continuing disparity, and continued unemployment? Why do we spend the time of the House dealing with this bill which, as I have said, is bad legislation, when the time of the House could more properly be directed to matters that have some priority for Canadians?

To indicate further the grounds upon which I feel this is a bad piece of legislation, I wish to make a personal observation. In my opinion this is another indication of the government's total lack of concern for individuals. I can only imagine that the government is more concerned with having a tidy piece of legislation that with the individual, and it is that essential thing which marks the difference between myself and the government. I was going to say this marks the difference between myself and the supporters of the government, but I know there are some hon. members opposite who are concerned for individuals. However, one would never gain that impression from reading legislation like this, especially considering it in the context of

the role which this House is supposed to fulfil in the lives of individuals.

It does not matter how small or large a group you collect, it is made up of individuals. When you have a piece of legislation that directly affects the well-being of an individual you have to be aroused, as my colleague from Halifax-East Hants (Mr. McCleave) said, and you have to participate in the discussion. On that ground along this is a second-rate piece of legislation. I wonder why this legislation is before us? I have asked, is it because the government has nothing better to do or because it has no other legislation ready to bring before us? I think that is a fairly serious charge. This is the principal point which brought me into the debate on third reading.

Now, I am afraid I must extend my remarks, Mr. Speaker. I come back and deal again with external relations. I hope the Parliamentary Secretary will find an occasion to deal with the international implications of our taking a unilateral step in this way. I would like answers to questions which I am sure have not been dealt with up until now. Hon. members opposite can laugh if they want. I am concerned about whether or not there were international negotiations. If there were, what contribution has been made to the debate to satisfy government supporters that this is not a unilateral step taken without concern for reciprocal arrangements in other countries?

• (12:50 p.m.)

We have not heard from the minister and there has been no comment from the Department of External Affairs in connection with this question. It appears that we have put ourselves into a situation that may have serious effects on the individual. Before members in the House could, in conscience, vote approval of this measure they would have to satisfy themselves as to what would happen to men sailing ships under the Canadian flag when they arrive in foreign ports. Geographical location has no relationship to illness and these seamen could become ill in China or Australia just as easily and quickly as at home. I suggest this is bad legislation, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said motion?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.