

*Canada Ports Corporation Act*

although one of the members is from Saint John, New Brunswick, and another is from Vancouver. On the other hand, the legislation does not provide for local autonomy with respect to the management and operation of the fifteen ports under the National Harbours Board, nor does it provide for regional input in the process of planning and establishing a national ports policy. As a result, the administration of these ports is highly centralized. So much for the first kind of port.

The Government Harbours and piers Act, the second body of legislation covering the administration of ports in Canada, governs more than 500 public facilities. This Act also goes back to 1936 and is just as outdated as the National Harbours Board Act. The facilities in question are also subject to the Canada Shipping Act and the Public Works Act, and this checkerboard of legislation constitutes a hindrance to sound planning and is not conducive to the investments that could be made in these port facilities. The ports usually come second to the National Harbours Board ports, but also include some that are fairly large.

The Harbour Commission Act, which governs the third kind of port we have in Canada, provides the most up-to-date legislation and as such is more compatible with present port administration practices. Under this Act, which goes back to 1964, ports may be operated and administered at the local level, which is more in line with the intent of Bill C-92, which I shall be discussing presently. However, the Harbour Commissions Act does not define a common objective for all ports where a national ports policy is concerned. Nor does it stipulate that the development of harbour commissions is an integral part of regional and national ports planning. In addition, the Act does not provide for the transfer from one type of port to another.

So that, Mr. Speaker, is the fairly complex situation in the administration of Canada's ports today.

*[English]*

Efforts have been made to improve the situation affecting ports in Canada within the existing structure. I would not want to leave the impression that our ports are in a generally backward state; far from it.

I must admit, however, that the public port facilities under Transport Canada have not seen a great deal of development in recent years. That is changing now. Planning for the future is improving considerably. For example, we currently have a series of master plans in progress with the objective of providing a coherent basis for future development of public port facilities in different areas of the Country.

● (2110)

Commission ports are doing much better. They are performing well. Thunder Bay, to mention one, maintained its position as the world's largest and most successful grain port. In terms of capacity to undertake new projects, I would point to the new forest products terminal at Duke Point at Nanaimo, British Columbia, which is the result of co-operation between the

federal government, the provincial government and the local harbour commission.

Most interesting, however, is the progress made at the 15 National Harbours Board ports which, by the way, handle 50 per cent of Canada's waterborne commerce. The other two types of ports each handle about 20 per cent.

In recent days I have been making an extra effort to focus attention on these ports. I believe their significant achievements are largely unrecognized, and that is regrettable. One need only look at the National Harbours Board latest annual report to see how well they are doing. For the first time in history, all 15 ports have a positive net income. Total tonnage, while down slightly from the record set in 1980, is still the second highest ever handled by the National Harbours Board.

The number of tonnes handled per employee, which is a good indication of productivity, increased from 58,000 in 1976 to 91,000 in 1981. Capital investment is up substantially, from \$38 million in 1980 to \$65 million in 1981.

The reorganization of the National Harbours Board debt—\$350 million of principal and \$150 million of interest, which was erased in 1981—contributed quite considerably to this positive picture I am painting tonight. It is equally true to say that the National Harbours Board, in spite of the drawbacks of its statutory environment, has developed into a sound organization which is now operated on a largely commercial basis by experienced professional employees.

If everything is so good, the obvious question is why the need for a new bill? I have already touched on a few of the reasons. I might emphasize the severe limitation on local autonomy which is symbolized by the famous statutory ceiling on contracts. Anything over \$50,000 requires governor in council approval. That is a symbol of the lack of autonomy given to these major port organizations. Others ports in Canada, the harbour commissions for example, and other ports in the world of the same size as Vancouver, Halifax, or Montreal have a lot more autonomy in their administration than those ports under the National Harbours Board. This is an anomaly the bill will correct.

Another reason for new legislation is the inability of the National Harbours Board to set its rates quickly and on a commercial basis to respond to local needs and to particular circumstances. It is a problem in that a port the size of Halifax or Vancouver, cannot act rapidly to set rates in relation to the competition.

The inability to transfer from one type of port to another is also a difficulty. The fragmentation of the legislative basis is also a problem as well as the lack of a common stated objective. These are difficulties the bill will attempt to cure.

This is not the first time such a ports bill has come before the House of Commons. Between 1977 and 1979, hon. members, in my absence, dealt with three bills, Bill C-61, Bill C-6 and Bill C-50. All died on the Order Paper without even getting to second reading. Therefore, we are making great progress tonight. With the assistance of all friends of Bill C-92 on all sides of the House, maybe it will be passed by the House this time.