

Harbour Commissions Act

This line of argument leads into a discussion of the twofold interest or responsibility of a harbour commission. As previously stated, commissions are formed on the basis of a great deal of local initiative and interest to promote the port to the benefit of the local community and its environs. The commissioners have the mandate to develop the local port potential to the maximum economic and social benefit of their community. That is the reasoning behind the appointment as commissioners of prominent local citizens who have a sincere interest in the total well-being of the port as a whole. It is felt that the appointment method best serves the community in that a careful selection of candidates can be made in view of the importance of the position of the harbour commission in the local community.

I just noted what was mentioned by the hon. member who presented this bill, and I might say that if he had his way I think the effect would be just the opposite from what he wishes. I think that the appointment of the commissioners should be the responsibility of the department under the 1964 act.

This local interest, although very important, is only one aspect of the function of a harbour commission. The second major interest of the commission is related to the fact that the harbours which are administered by the 1964 act are component parts of the national and international transportation system. The ports provide a vital land-water interface in the transport and transshipment of goods, people and services.

Mr. Reynolds: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I wonder if the hon. member could tell us—and I am not quite sure I understood what he was saying—whether he feels that the people in the area could not elect better people as commissioners than his government or any government could appoint. Is that what he is saying?

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): I did not understand the point made by the hon. member. Is he asking me a question regarding my view of the matter? If so, I would like him to repeat his question.

Mr. Reynolds: My point of order does not relate to the hon. member's view but his statement. He referred to my remarks. I am wondering—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. The hon. member should address himself to the Chair. The hon. member is asking the parliamentary secretary a question regarding certain remarks. The parliamentary secretary is entitled to reply if he wishes, or he may complete his speech.

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): May I accept that suggestion immediately, and upon concluding my statement I will be glad to answer the hon. member's question.

Because the British North America Act of 1867 placed navigation and shipping under the exclusive jurisdiction of the federal authority, the federal interest is an inherent part of harbour administration in Canada. This historic direction is carried out by the appointed commissioners and it is felt that commissioners elected by the municipality may not evidence this philosophy in their administra-

[Mr. Guay (St. Boniface).]

tion of the port, and thus the election of commissioners may not be in the best interest of Canada as a whole.

The national interest in port development and administration goes beyond the constitutional jurisdiction of shipping and navigation. The federal government, through various assistance programs, is involved in the economic development of various agencies and industries which use the port facilities. In view of the dependence of many of these industries on the port facilities in Canada, it is felt that the appointed commissioners function as a guiding control in the development of the port as a service function for these industries. The development of the total port hinterland in terms of the national economy is viewed as being an important function of harbour commissions, and in light of this it is felt that commissioners appointed by the governor in council and the municipalities involved best serve this purpose.

Bill C-39 calls for the election of capable and qualified people as commissioners, and a third line of argument may be built around this proposal. It is on this matter that the hon. member was questioning me, I believe. It is felt that on the whole, the commissioners who have been appointed in the past, both by federal and municipal authorities, have been dedicated to their task and have conscientiously carried out their port development and promotion policies with the best interest of the total industry in mind. It is felt that the appointed commissioners have not allowed their personal biases to influence their decision making process. We feel and fear that under certain, albeit hypothetical, conditions the situation could arise whereby elected commissioners could be influenced greatly by local pressure groups, and their decisions regarding port administration might not be made with all due regard to the real function of the port.

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It has been our experience that local groups, concerned for example about ecology and pollution, can raise a strong lobby in the media and create a very biased public opinion with regard to port operations and administration. This has been very graphically evident in Hamilton, for example, where land fill operations and land exchanges between the commission and the local steel companies have developed into major public issues because of the actions of extreme lobbyists.

If Bill C-39 were to be passed it is possible that a concerned but extreme group of citizens could put forward a slate of candidates who would only be concerned with one segment of the port, or one problem associated with the port, to the subjugation of the over-all local and national interest. It is entirely possible that the elected commissioners could be wholly composed of fishermen, or stevedores or environmentalists and, as a result, the work of the harbour commission might possibly reflect their very strong personal biases and not the over-all concept of port development. We feel that the views of the various concerned or action groups which exist today must be given their fair voice and hearing, but that these people are not the ones to administer harbour commissions. It is felt that the appointed commissioners appreciate their responsibility to the larger community served by the port and that the appointment method should be continued.