

Navigable Waters Protection Act

Mr. Gregg: It reads as follows:

No person shall accept employment or act as a seaman on board a Canadian ship in the great lakes, unless he is the holder of a provisional or regular seaman's card.

It is in connection with what was implied in the question of the hon. member for Greenwood that I want to give the committee a fairly full report as to what is involved under the existing regulations because the procedure, if the bill is put into effect, would be the same as under the former regulations. I will try to outline the situation as briefly as I can.

A seaman seeking employment on a vessel operating on the great lakes and upper St. Lawrence must make application to a local office of the national employment service for the issue of a seaman's card and must be in possession of either a provincial or a regular seaman's card to secure employment. You may ask the question at this point: Why were the Department of Labour and the national employment service chosen from among all the departments of government to act in this regard? I think there were two points involved. One of them, which is quite important, was the fact that my department and the unemployment insurance commission from day to day have a good deal to do with organized labour, the workers of Canada, and perhaps were as well equipped as anyone to discuss both with organized management and with organized labour all the factors involved in this proposed step that was taken under threat of emergency back in 1950. And so it was.

We discussed the matter at that time with the dominion marine association of Toronto representing the shipping companies or employers. We discussed it fully with the representatives of unions operating on the great lakes, namely, the Canadian merchants service guild—deck officers—the national association of marine engineers and the international seafarers union. I may say that after a full discussion of all the points involved none of the organizations, either employer or employee, expressed any disagreement with the step involved. There were differences of opinion of course as to how it could best be accomplished.

The second reason why the Minister of Labour was chosen to administer these regulations was the fact that he was responsible for the 230 national employment offices across Canada and it did appear that those offices and their officials would be best equipped to do the routine work for the convenience of applicants seeking work.

This is the procedure that we have been following. We issue provisional cards to new applicants as they appear at the local national employment offices. Such cards are valid for sixty days. During that period of time the individual's application form, accompanied by photographs and fingerprints, is turned over to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for investigation. After the application has been screened, a regular seaman's card has been issued to him by the national employment office in exchange for the interim or provisional card issued at the time of this application, providing of course that it is not withheld for the reason the Minister of Labour has been satisfied that the presence of the applicant on board a Canadian ship in the great lakes might prejudice the security of Canada.

Where the screening of the application takes longer than 60 days, as was frequently the case at the beginning, it is not the practice to bar the seaman from employment but rather he has been permitted to continue sailing under his provisional card until the security screening has been completed. Where no derogatory information relating to national security is disclosed by the screening, a regular seaman's card is issued as a matter of course, and in my statement earlier I indicated to the house that that applied in a total of over 30,000. Where information bearing on national security is uncovered, that information concerning the application is dispatched to and considered by the Minister of Labour and his advisers.

Information received from the R.C.M.P. or any other source is assessed by the minister, and if he feels that the information received is sufficient to warrant the denial or withdrawal of a seaman's card, he so withdraws or denies it. In cases where the minister is satisfied the presence of the applicant on board a Canadian ship in the great lakes might prejudice the security of Canada, the applicant is so advised by a personal letter from the minister delivered personally by an official of the national employment service of the unemployment insurance commission. The seaman is then required to surrender any valid provisional or regular card. At the same time, if the question is raised by the seaman he is advised that he may, by an application in writing to the minister, request that his case be reviewed by the advisory committee. This advisory committee is composed of a retired judge of the exchequer court and two representatives of organized labour appointed after consultation with responsible national bodies of organized labour.