

Maritime Code

have some real chance of allowing the bill to make progress.

Mr. J. H. Horner (Crowfoot): Mr. Speaker, I was particularly pleased with the minister's answer to the suggestion of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). He seemed to receive favourably the suggestion that an amendment be moved to refer the bill back to committee for further study, and that would be acceptable to me. We intend, I think, to make a motion to that effect later in the debate.

In days gone by this would probably have been considered a rather unique debate. The subject of a Canadian maritime code has been around parliament for a number of years. We are presently going through what is, I think, the longest session on record, yet this bill came before the House late last November, was passed on to committee on December 8, and we find ourselves at this late date being asked to give unanimous consent to three substantive amendments to the bill. I think this is an indication of poor handling of House business on the part of the government. I do not have the committee proceedings for December 8 with me, but it also appears that a certain practice is becoming widespread in the House and in committee. I refer to the fact that the committee was urged by government members not to call witnesses so as to speed the bill through. This was back on December 8, and the bill received rather rapid passage through committee.

I would not accuse committee members of not being diligent, but because not as many witnesses were called as possibly should have been called, the government argued throughout the winter months with a former colleague of theirs, now a minister of transport on the west coast, as a result of which we now have conflicting reports from the ministers of transport or premiers of the Atlantic provinces in regard to this legislation, and I include the province of Newfoundland.

At one time the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) said that the Atlantic provinces were in agreement with this bill. However, when we contacted them they said no, they would not agree to it without further changes. The minister has now told the House that he is prepared to give his utmost assurance that clauses 8 to 16 will not be approved until everyone is completely satisfied with the regulations that are to follow.

The minister's words have been severely questioned. It took him a great deal of time and negotiation with another body before he was able to give any assurance at all. It behooves every member of parliament to take his job seriously, to pass legislation and to serve his constituents well. Certainly, we are not going to turn over those responsibilities to the minister, and we will not leave it to him to decide when he has the complete assurance of the interested parties in this matter, the shippers and shipping companies.

In addition to improving perhaps the maritime code, the minister has said that over the winter there was lengthy consultation with the shippers and shippers. A rather simple check on how much consultation was held would readily indicate it was not nearly as much as we were led to believe by the minister today.

● (1550)

We are told that this measure is important for the economy of Canada. The minister admitted a few minutes ago that at no time has there been a cost-benefit study carried out. We have also been told during other debates on transportation matters that the "user pay" concept is the new principle on which the minister is staking his reputation. Apparently he is going to make the user pay. Some days ago, during a debate in the House of Commons, I suggested that the user is deeply concerned about this new concept. The user believes this will cost him more money.

First of all, the bill tends to minimize competition. It suggests there may be a shortage of vessels and at times there may be an inefficient use of available vessels. The bill seems to suggest that Canadian raw materials or resource products may be moved by ocean liners to foreign countries for manufacture at cheaper rates than those applying to similar movements to Canadian ports. That seems to indicate an increased cost of finished goods. The bill also seems to point out that many foreign products will be in a favoured competitive position and may even replace some Canadian products because of the increased transportation cost to Canadian companies. All of these concerns have not been fully considered by the minister, his department or the transportation committee which studied this matter. I certainly agree with the suggestion that the whole matter be referred back to the committee where more witnesses can be called. Without having a net cost or net benefit study to determine whether Canada will benefit from this bill and the "user pay" concept, I think members would be derelict in their duty if they accepted the bill wholeheartedly.

The other aspect of the "user pay" concept is that we are led to believe this will develop a whole new Canadian merchant marine and increase shipbuilding in Canada. The minister suggests that the full implementation of the bill will not take place for perhaps five years. He says this will give some time for those Canadian ships to be built. I suggest that while some ships may be built by then—and I suspect that many others will still be in construction—losses to the industry, such as those that will take place through lack of improvements to the STELCO steel mills and the linerboard plant in Newfoundland, will be tremendous. The resulting loss in jobs, I suggest, will be greater than the increase in jobs in the Canadian shipbuilding industry and the coasting trade.

We must take a very close look at this bill. It is regrettable that we have reached this stage of the session having to go on the minister's assurances. Already he has had a number of amendments ratified by the committee. The committee ratified a whole host of amendments during its sittings, and we now have three more in respect of which there has been no consultation.

The minister suggested that the provisions contained in clauses 8 to 16 would not be implemented immediately. The whole question of passenger trade on the west coast has not been satisfactorily explained. We have not had a satisfactory explanation regarding the number of vessels in the coastal trade on the west coast of other than Canadian registry. A great number of these ships provide a service to many many Canadian centres along the west coast, and fears in this regard have to be considered as well.