

Canada Shipping Act

I must say that if we cannot have Clause 4 struck out of Bill C-75, at least we will not object to the amendments presented by our colleague—the amendment before the House today.

But why should we agree to an amendment that is not as good as we would like it to be? It is because a bird in hand is better than no bird at all. What Clause 4 of the Bill gives the Government is the kind of absolute authority which in this day and age is unthinkable and unacceptable.

The Minister of Transport (Mr. Mazankowski) has taken advantage of a Bill that amends the Canada Shipping Act, and the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act, the Maritime Code Act and the Oil and Gas Production and Conservation Act. Here we have a series of non-controversial measures, measures that are acceptable and praiseworthy and which could have been debated very quickly in the House and could have obtained the unanimous approval of all Members on both sides of the House.

But the Government saw in Bill C-75 a unique opportunity to create a new authority which I find quite unacceptable, the authority to impose a Canadian Coast Guard maritime service cost recovery program.

Clause 4 of Bill C-75 is the one we find so unacceptable and so reprehensible. We denounce it and we simply cannot understand why the Government chose to ignore all representations made in that respect.

The previous speaker listed a series of associations and organizations which have found fault with Clause 4 and urged the Government not to proceed with this part of the Bill.

Why do we share the views of all those who appeared before the committee to denounce this part of the Bill? Because the percentage of recovery, the charges imposed, the way they will be collected and, in short, who will pick up the tab are all matters left to the full discretion of the Governor in Council—the Minister of Transport, of course, but also his colleagues the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) and the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. de Cotret) who, as we know, are one-track-minded when it comes to finding new sources of revenues to reduce the Government's deficit.

Although some people do have confidence in the Minister of Transport, most of those who gave evidence before the Committee on Transport and the committee which considered Bill C-75, have strong reservations about the Minister of Finance and the President of the Treasury Board.

Nevertheless, we cannot agree with leaving the assessment of these costs to the entire discretion of Cabinet. In fact, that is what the Minister of Transport wanted when he presented the Bill and asked the Committee to vote in favour of the principle of service charges and give him and his Cabinet colleagues *carte blanche* to do as they see fit.

The Coast Guard services referred to in Clause 4 are aids to navigation, dredging, vessel traffic services, ice breaking services, vessel escort services and sounding. Since the Bill fails to define exact perimeters, there may be a host of other services,

as yet undefined, which may also be affected and may become a financial burden for people in the shipping industry, who because of the economic situation are having considerable problems at this time.

If we stick to a rigid interpretation of Clause 4, service charges would apply only to navigation services and not necessarily to the entire Marine Transportation Program. Now it is interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that total expenditures for the Marine Transportation Program in 1985-86 were set at \$824 million. The cost recovery now being requested for the same Coast Guard services represents about 3 per cent of total expenditures or \$24.7 million.

When the Minister appeared before the Committee, he wanted to re-assure Members present, saying that his Department was not aiming at more than a 7 per cent cost recovery—in other words, 4 per cent more than the present recovery rate. He added that this would represent an increase in revenue of about \$20 million.

● (1530)

Mr. Speaker, what worries me, and that is why I raise this point this afternoon, is that the users of these services, who have a vested interest in what is happening, are the ones who expressed their concern and made the most strenuous objections to this part of Bill C-75. And I must say they are right to be concerned, because this formula is not laid down in the Bill. I am quite prepared to believe what the Minister says, but I wonder why he failed to put it in writing in the Bill. Without wishing to doubt the Minister's word, it is obvious that he has full authority to increase the recovery percentage as and when he sees fit.

I see that the Parliamentary Secretary is doing his job—he gets paid to defend the Minister—and waxing indignant in the House. He may resent what I am saying here, but all I am doing is echoing the hundreds and hundreds of representations made to the committee Members who studied this Bill and who are saying in no uncertain terms that such absolute ministerial discretion is unacceptable. The Parliamentary Secretary's attack is not levelled against me but against all these associations and individuals who aired their grievances before the committee.

To some extent the amendment moved by the New Democratic Party clarifies the executory regulations from which would flow the Minister's absolute power. I am therefore prepared to accept the amendment because, at the very least, it does limit the extent of the power of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Mazankowski) and his Cabinet colleagues.

I am glad to see that the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. de Cotret) has just entered the House, because he should give more consideration to the concerns that have been expressed about Clause 4 of Bill C-75 more specifically by the Montreal Chamber of Commerce and the Montreal Board of Trade. Hopefully the President of the Treasury Board will make personal representations to the Minister of Transport