

Appendix
(R.R.R.R.)

24th April.

some persons propose) an annual trade will immediately be created to the country of £48,000. From what I have already said, supported by experience and by facts, I would humbly suggest that the advances made to sailors should not be limited, and that the whole should be left to the discretion of the ship-master, who should certainly be considered the best judge in these matters.

Pierre Doucet, Esquire, Clerk of the Peace, in and for the District of Quebec, appeared before this Committee, and answered as follows to the above questions :—

1. I am inclined to think that the Act of the 10 and 11 Victoria, chapter 25, has been far from attaining the end proposed by the Legislature, if we can judge of it by its results from the short space of time that it has been in operation; for this Act, passed for the advantage of trade, and with a view to stop the desertion of seamen, has only had the effect of annihilating a branch of industry favourable to the greater part of the population of the suburbs of St. Roch, St. Louis, of the Champlain Ward, and of the coves of Quebec, by depriving the numerous class of stevedores and their assistants of the profit of a branch of industry on which they are dependant, without any results capable of compensating the loss of this branch of local industry; and has also the immediate effect of favouring the desertion of seamen to foreign ports, to the United States or the Upper Lakes.

2. Considering the short space of time during which this Act has been in operation, it is difficult to determine whether any advantages might eventually result from it to the merchant navy, or to trade, but up to the present time it has not produced any good whatsoever.

3. If any advantage has resulted from it, it can only be in favour of a very small number of ship-owners, and of the shipping master.

4. Yes; the seamen have in general refused to ship through the medium of the shipping master, and a large number of them, as I have been informed, have reached the ports of the United States. The return furnished by Mr. Hawkins, and fyled before this Committee, by which it appears that there are 947 seamen whom he can give no account of, seems to confirm this opinion.

5. I do not think that the Act in question has had the effect of diminishing the desertion. Some persons appear to be of this opinion, and found their calculations on the difference of the number of deserters in the two years, 1847 and 1848. I apprehend this opinion is erroneous, for no comparison can be established between the two years, if it be considered that in 1847, 1210 vessels entered the Port of Quebec, and that at that time the typhus fever, which was decimating the large emigration of that year, was also spreading among the crews of these vessels, and occasioned numerous desertions; and that on the contrary in 1848, only 1188 vessels entered, and there was no epidemic. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at if the number of deserters has been less during this year than in 1847. I must also call attention to the fact, that during the year 1847, a large number of seamen who had been reported as deserters, returned to their vessels, after the landing of the emigrants, the ventilation of the vessels, and the disappearance of danger. I take the liberty of submitting a statement of the number of vessels arrived at Quebec from 1844 to 1848, inclusive, (the said statement being marked D), the number of sailors in the crews, the number of deserters against whom proceedings have been adopted before the Magistrates, and the proportion of such deserters of each vessel, compared with the total number of seamen.

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6. No; and to succeed in again shipping at Quebec, they have no other means than that of counterfeiting a certificate of discharge, so rigorous are the restrictions imposed on their being shipped.

8. The seamen have the greatest repugnance to ship at the shipping office, and many, as I have been told, have refused wages of £8 or £10 a month, so odious to them is this mode of shipping.

9. Judging from the number of offences, I should say not. In 1847, there were 873 offences under the Merchant Seamen's Act, while in 1848 there were 980, making an increase for 1848 of 107 offences, although in 1848 the number of seamen who entered the port was less by 1141 than during the preceding year. The offences under the Police Ordinance are less by 85 in 1848 than in 1847; but if it is observed that in 1848 the number of sailors who entered the port was less by 1141, it will be seen that this disproportion of 85 does not affect what I have stated.

10. I think so.

11. I believe so, since they pray for its repeal, and I refer to their petition on this subject.

12. Yes; and I know that ship-masters have been unable to obtain crews through the mediation of the shipping office, and have been delayed for several days at the Port of Quebec after having received their lading; and I shall instance among others, in support of what I advance, the brig "Southampton," Captain Daniel Ross, which was delayed for a long time in the Port of Quebec for want of being able to get a crew. In this case, Captain Ross, after waiting for several days, was under the necessity of shipping a crew himself, and was subsequently sued and condemned to pay a fine for having hired and received on board the brig "Southampton," seamen who had deserted from other vessels. The proceedings against Captain Ross are now pending before the Court of Queen's Bench at Quebec, where they were returned on writ of *certiorari*.

The present law is prejudicial not only to the working class, but also to the trade of Quebec in general. Before the passing of the Act, the seamen who deserted and abandoned their vessels to ship on board another, always returned in an English vessel; but at present being unable to ship on board a vessel in port without having a certificate of discharge from the master of the vessel in which they came, they desert on arriving at Quebec, take refuge in the United States, and thus become lost to our navy. The average number of vessels arriving at our port is 1200; by allowing ten men to a vessel, we have a total of 12,000 seamen. Before the passing of the Act, these twelve thousand men received, on arriving at Quebec, about two pounds each and a like sum at their departure, making a total of £48,000, the greater part of which was expended among our population, while more than 3000 labourers from the suburbs were employed in loading the vessels and gained each about £20 during the season, making another sum of £60,000 expended in our trade. But, on the other hand, under the present law, the seamen in place of amusing themselves on their arrival at Quebec, are kept on board the vessels to load them, and are only paid on their return to the different ports of Great Britain.

14. This Bill contains restrictions which are too severe on the seamen, and should be repealed for the reasons above stated; and I think that by obtaining the repeal of those clauses of the Imperial Act 7 and 8 Victoria, chap. 112, which interfere with the licensing of the sailors at Quebec, and by subjecting, by a law, those persons who keep boarding-houses for the reception of seamen, to the same regulations as those to which tavern-keepers are at present subject, we should obtain without difficulty the end proposed by the Legislature by the Act of the 10 and 11 Vic., chap. 25.