

Canada Shipping Act

● (12:30 p.m.)

Mr. Barnett: Mr. Speaker, we reach the third reading stage of this bill conscious of the fact that it has come back to us from the committee in an amended form. I think it is important perhaps to clarify just what the change made by the committee signifies, and that has already been mentioned in the discussion this morning. In some respects this bill proposes a phasing out of the arrangement for sick mariners which have operated over a long period of years in Canada. There are two aspects to the proposed changes: one is to shift the financial responsibility directly to the owners of non-Canadian ships for the provision of medical, surgical and hospital care for the crews of those vessels. If I understand the proposal correctly, it places this liability but does not necessarily mean that the Canadian authorities operating under the terms of the Shipping Act will withdraw from any responsibility for a sick mariner if, in fact, he is left stranded in a Canadian port. In view of the explanations that were given to us about the growing trends around the world toward the adoption of various forms of medical insurance plans to which ship owners directly or indirectly contribute in their own countries, I for one am content that this particular amendment is appropriate at this time.

The other aspect of the bill has to do with the situation in respect of Canadian ships, and in particular with the effect of this bill upon Canadian seamen who are engaged in fishing. As I indicated at the committee stage of the bill, a good deal of concern was expressed by fishermen on the Pacific Coast of Canada that, as a result of the passage of this bill, they would lose their rights to benefits which they had enjoyed. There was an impression that they might lose some benefits which they had enjoyed if they become ill and require medical attention or hospitalization in U.S. ports. Following the introduction of the bill, the committee held its first meeting on the bill on February 10. This matter was examined and discussed by those concerned with the welfare of fishermen on the British Columbia coast, and it appears to me now that the effect of the bill will not be to deprive Canadian fishermen of benefits which they might have enjoyed in U.S. ports had it not been introduced. Therefore, the objections which I initially raised would appear to have been met by an investigation of the facts.

As I understand it, there is out-of-country coverage provided for hospitalization under

our national hospitalization plan. In addition, if a province, in this case the province of British Columbia, is in the medicare plan, there is provision of medical services under the terms of that plan. As I understand it, the British Columbia medical plan, in line with the national provisions, provides coverage for costs incurred up to the level of the costs which would be paid for under the plan in British Columbia. This, I suppose, is about as far as one can rightfully expect Canadian authorities to go. There may be cases where costs are higher in a foreign port where some liability would rest upon the fishermen. This is what I understand the situation to be.

The other aspect of the matter is directly related to the amendment which was made to the bill in committee. I refer to the coverage of fishermen for medical expenses which are not covered by the medicare plan. I am happy with the fact that the committee, in its amendment, met the principal point which was argued by the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis) and myself at the committee stage when we met on February 10. The original bill specifically exempted, under the proposed Section 318A, any coverage of drugs if a medical plan was in effect, other than drugs administered directly to that sick mariner by a designated medical practitioner. As we all know, under the national medicare plan drug coverage is not provided and I am therefore glad that the way is left open for the optional arrangement to be made by a fisherman to cover himself for drug costs under the sick mariner provisions of this act, and under the scale of fees which would normally be payable. This may well be an insurance coverage which a great many fishermen will desire to obtain and continue.

So, in considering this bill at the third reading stage, I would like to say I am pleased that the department, on considering the discussion that took place in the committee, has agreed to this particular amendment for which we argued. For that reason, I am happy to support the third reading of the bill as it stands now.

Mr. Robert McCleave (Halifax-East Hants): This is one of those occasions when a member interested in a bill is thoroughly aroused by good, thoughtful speeches in the House of Commons. I think my colleague, the hon. member for South Western Nova (Mr. Comeau) has certainly aroused my interest to the point of participation with the two amendments that he tried to get through earlier. I think