

*Inquiries of the Ministry***CANADIAN COASTGUARD****ALLEGED INABILITY TO RENDER ASSISTANCE
TO SHIPS IN DISTRESS**

On the orders of the day:

Mr. Lloyd R. Crouse (Queens-Lunenburg): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the Minister of Transport. In view of the inability of the Canadian coastguard to provide assistance to Nova Scotia fishermen during a recent storm, which resulted in the loss of two lives, will the minister give consideration to constructing adequate ships for the coastguard service, with authority granted to the captains to rescue crews and tow disabled ships to port when they are in trouble?

Hon. J. W. Pickersgill (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, if I might be permitted to make a slightly more than usually extended reply to the hon. gentleman's question I may say that last autumn—I have the date somewhere here—the hon. member will recall a question arose about towing by the coastguard. I undertook at that time to have the matter looked into and to see whether more satisfactory and more clearly defined arrangements could be made in this regard.

This matter has been receiving consideration and certain clarifications in the instructions—which I do not think the hon. gentleman would expect me to attempt to outline here—have been made.

With respect to the recent tragic events off the coasts of Nova Scotia there is, I am frank to admit, evidence that there was a certain lack of adequate co-ordination between the various—

An hon. Member: There sure was.

Mr. Pickersgill: I am admitting it without any hesitation, and with deep regret because lives were lost. There was a lack of adequate co-ordination between the various agencies which collectively have the responsibility for search and rescue. I am not pretending there wasn't. I have investigated this thing very carefully, or at least had it investigated. I have seen the reports, so far, of the investigations and it is my opinion that even if this lack of co-ordination had not existed, in the circumstances with which the hon. member for Queens-Lunenburg is more familiar with than I, it would, unhappily, have made no real difference because there was no vessel capable of dealing with the terrible situations in those terrible storms. But if it did not serve to do any other good it did

reveal there were some defects in communication and organization. I intend to do everything I can, and I am sure all the ministers who have this responsibility intend to do everything they can, to see that any defects in co-ordination are remedied without delay. I say this without even having had a chance to consult with my colleague the Minister of National Defence who has just returned to Ottawa and who has, as head of the R.C.A.F., the primary responsibility, but I know I have his concurrence.

I would not pretend for a moment that even the best practices in the world would enable us to deal with the kind of storm, the like of which has not taken place for years and which afflicted the east coast a short while ago.

Mr. Crouse: I wish to thank the minister for his answer and ask him whether in re-considering the duties of the Canadian coastguard service he would consider giving authority to the captains of these ships to act upon their own discretion in cases of distress.

Mr. Pickersgill: There is a great deal more latitude given to captains now than they thought they had when this incident took place some months ago. This is a difficult problem because one has to be sure that we are not supplanting people who make their living by towing and that there is a genuine case of distress, not a case of someone who wants to get something free.

CANADIAN FLAG**INQUIRY AS TO DATE OF PROCLAMATION—
CEREMONIES**

On the orders of the day:

[*Translation*]

Hon. Léon Balcer (Three Rivers): Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the Prime Minister if he is in a position to inform the house at what date the government intends to proclaim the new single maple leaf flag, the distinctive national flag, and what kind of ceremony the government intends to prepare to observe this historical event?

[*Text*]

Right Hon. L. B. Pearson (Prime Minister): This matter is under consideration. There are a good many formalities to be completed, as I have informed the house previously, including the proclamation by Her Majesty. It is hoped that these formalities will be concluded in a matter of weeks. Then there is the question of proclaiming the flag in Canada