

Vessel Construction Act

ships and assists the owner to amortize the expenditure in connection with new construction.

I think perhaps that is all I care to say at this juncture. My own feeling, the feeling of the government and I am sure the feeling of the vast majority of hon. members, is that this is an excellent bill. To some hon. members it does not go far enough. If you are dealing with the shipping end, then I am afraid I cannot disagree with that contention. As far as shipbuilding goes, however, I do not see how we could have gone much further than we are going, in allowing the owner of a ship to write off new construction in three years, or to write off conversion costs in three years, as this bill does. So I am sure it will commend itself to hon. members.

Mr. Stuart (Charlotte): Might I ask the minister if all boats engaged in the fishing industry will come under this regulation, or if there is some restriction as to size.

Mr. Chevrier: The ships covered by this bill are those mentioned in the Canada Shipping Act, which defines a vessel as follows:

"Vessel" includes any ship or boat or any other description of vessel used or designed to be used in navigation.

So the answer to my hon. friend's question would be yes.

Mr. Drew: There is one feature of the explanation given by the minister that it seems to me might well create some misunderstanding as to the purpose of this bill. Its purpose is to carry out certain of the recommendations of the maritime commission, at least as far as assistance to the shipbuilding industry is concerned. While they do not presume to say how it shall be done, from the remarks of the minister it is obvious that the reason for this is to be found in the report itself, to which he referred with respect to certain details.

It is not possible to separate shipbuilding and shipping in the way the minister suggests. That is made perfectly clear at page 48 of this excellent report, which sums up the situation. According to the report, from a wartime high employment in the shipbuilding industry of 75,000 we have now come down to approximately 11,400, as of March 31 of this year, and the minister has told us this has further fallen to 8,300 as of the end of October. In reviewing the situation with respect to employment the report says at page 48:

For the purpose of this report it may therefore be assumed that in the future 3,500 men can be maintained in the shipyards on repairs and conversions alone. The remaining 3,500 men employed on new construction . . .

[Mr. Chevrier.]

That clearly indicates that the discussion now taking place in relation to this bill has to do with a situation in which we may expect 3,500 men to be employed in shipbuilding and 3,500 in repairs and conversions. If we accept that statement, then shipping is very closely related to shipbuilding, because without active shipping we would not have the repairs and conversions; in any event the two are associated. There is no use building ships if those ships are not to be used for shipping, so the whole subject before us relates to the over-all policy of the government based upon the information contained in this report.

Whether this bill will achieve what is hoped, only time can tell. It is difficult for us even to know whether this is the best type of assistance that can be given, without having a more clearly stated declaration of policy by the government in relation to this report. I do think that on this occasion it is important to emphasize what has been the effect of withholding this report. I am not going to engage in any discussion as to why the report was delayed or otherwise, but it was presented to the minister on June 30. Under the act, it should have been tabled by the end of September. The report did not come to the house until November 24, at a time when we are sitting from eleven o'clock in the morning until eleven o'clock at night. Naturally, it was not possible for the members to devote the attention they would have otherwise devoted to this comprehensive review of the situation in regard to shipbuilding today, the history that has preceded that, and what this commission foresees in the future.

Mr. Chevrier: Will my hon. friend permit a question?

Mr. Drew: Yes, surely.

Mr. Chevrier: Will he tell me, if he can, how the delay in the filing of this report has had one iota of effect upon the bill which is now before the house, and the advantage which shipowners will derive from this bill.

Mr. Drew: Earlier today we saw an excellent example of what can be done by the proposals put forward by private members, in regard to things that are for the advantage of the people of Canada. If this report had been tabled at the beginning of the session, with the extremely comprehensive survey of the shipbuilding industry and shipping which it covers, it might well be that this industry, which is today in so precarious a position both from a shipbuilding point of view and shipping, might have had the advantage of practical suggestions that would have implemented certain of the findings in this report.