



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 52/23

THE CANADIAN MERCHANT MARINE

An address by the Minister of Transport, Mr. Lionel Chevrier, to the National Council of Seamen's Agencies, at Montreal, June 11, 1952.

...In this country, my Department of Transport administers the Canada Shipping Act. It keeps records of seamen signing on Canadian ships, it arranges for the examination of officers and men, it regulates in the field of pilotage, it provides aids to navigation, and the Board to Steamship Inspection within the Department is responsible for safety requirements. As Minister of Transport, the Canadian Maritime Commission and the National Harbours Board report to me. From almost all these sources I have good reason to know the importance of the work you do and what it means to the men of the sea.

Canada is one of the leading trading nations of the world, particularly if the measurement is made on a per capita basis. About one-third of our national production goes to export and about one-third of our requirements are imported. Since most of our important products move either by sea or by inland water routes, or by both, it will be apparent that we have a vital interest in the ships and the seamen who serve us. And yet the Canadian ocean fleet is not a large one by world standards. In normal years there is greater employment in our coastal trades than on ocean-going vessels, while employment on the Great Lakes is greater than in both these salt water trades combined.

There was a time when Canada ranked much higher among the maritime nations of the world. The Canadian shipping industry dates from the early 18th century, when the first commercial ventures in shipbuilding began, based on local timber. The industry prospered in the 19th century and reached its peak in 1878. Canada then boasted 7196 vessels of 1,333,000 tons, and ranked fourth among the shipowning nations of the world.

The fortunes of Canadian shipowners began to decline soon after that, however, with the coming of a new era of steel and steam. By the turn of the century Canada's merchant marine had been greatly reduced in tonnage, and since then the business of operating ocean-going vessels has never really prospered here. No doubt this is regrettable, not only from a romantic point of view but for practical reasons too, as we have found out in two World Wars. But it is a direct reflection of our high standards of living compared with other maritime nations.

For shipping is a highly competitive business, and Canadian standards of wages and working conditions make for high costs, second only to those of the United States. Such costs can be covered when shipping is in strong demand and ocean rates are high. But high rates have been the exception rather than the rule over the years, and low rates soon force Canadian operators out of business.