

After Recess

The committee resumed at 8.15 p.m.

DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES

72. Development of the deep sea fisheries and the demand for fish, \$30,000.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Mr. Chairman, as I notified the minister before the dinner recess, I desire to review briefly the situation which has arisen in the bay of Chaleur district, province of New Brunswick, with respect to conditions surrounding the operations of deep sea fishermen at that point. Like those in the Gaspé district, the fishermen on the Caraquet coast are engaged, for the most part, in the catching of prime codfish. In order to do so it is necessary that they should have at all times an adequate supply of bait.

The bait most commonly used is the common herring. The fishermen themselves—or some of them—catch these fish, presumably in nets. Since they have no way of taking care of the bait, except to a very limited degree, and since the best bait comes from the freezers, it is customary for these fishermen to sell the fresh herring to the freezers and then, as they require fresh bait, they repurchase the herring.

Some years ago a number of freezing plants were established in the Caraquet district, especially at Shippigan and at Caraquet village. But during the depression, and even before that time, these freezers fell more or less into decay, and were not commercially operated. During the depression the plight of the fishermen on the Caraquet coast, in common with that of their brothers across the bay, was rather desperate. The prices paid for prime cod were so low, owing to the failure of the export trade, that the fishermen could not make a living. The consequence was that gear, fishing vessels and the like went into decay. During the depression these men had an exceedingly difficult time.

Between 1935 and 1940, the provincial government of New Brunswick, having decided to ameliorate the condition of these fishermen, induced a very large and wealthy corporation from Gloucester, Massachusetts, to establish a subsidiary corporation in New Brunswick. This corporation, known as Gorton Pew, N.B., Limited, with substantial assistance from the provincial government, and with a grant of a good many thousands of dollars from this federal treasury handed out to them, I think—

Mr. BERTRAND (Laurier): The grant was given by the federal government to the provinces.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): My recollection is that it went direct to the company,

[Mr. Speaker.]

although it may have passed through the provincial government. The minister's officials will be fully advised as to the details, and the point does not affect the situation to which I shall refer.

The result was that there was established at Caraquet, in the county of Gloucester, New Brunswick, a large freezing and processing plant which has been in operation more or less continuously ever since. Whether it has fulfilled all the functions for which it was intended, I am not in a position to say; and I do not purpose criticizing that feature of the case. I am going to draw the minister's attention to the fact that the prices paid by this company for fish, having regard to the present high prices received for the processed product, are wholly inadequate.

Before turning to that point, however, may I direct the minister's attention to another circumstance, the one I had in mind chiefly when I rose to speak. I point out to him that the prices paid by this company, which operates under a very large capital subsidy, to the fisherman for the fresh bait, as he brings it in, is exceedingly low. Only two cents a pound is paid for the herring. That herring is brought to the pier by the fisherman. It is then weighed in by company officials, put in the bins, salted, partly frozen, and there awaits distribution to the fisherman for his purposes in connection with the catching of cod fish. The prices charged by the company, on the other hand, to the fishermen for the same bait is not two cents a pound, but five cents a pound, or 150 per cent higher. I submit to the minister that that is an unwarranted increase in price, having regard to the fact that the only expense the company could have is that connected with the weighing in of the fish, and with salting and semi-freezing in order to preserve it against the time when the fishermen may want bait—which may be in the following week.

I hold in my hands two invoices which I shall be glad to show the minister, although I desire that the name of the fisherman should not be made public. One invoice is for a sale by a fisherman to Gorton Pew, N.B., Limited, of 150 pounds of bait herring at two cents a pound, for a total of \$3. The second invoice is for a purchase of 5,400 pounds of herring bait for \$27, which works out at exactly five cents a pound.

Mr. KINLEY: What is the date of each invoice?

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): One is May and the other is June; they are within recent days.

This is a situation which ought not to obtain. I do not know whether the minister has any