

*National Harbours Board*

chits and instructions and directions, he will find that he has not accomplished what Sir Alexander Gibb in one of the paragraphs of the report refers to in connection with the "political" administration of the board. If the harbour is to be administered as a political unit, this bill has accomplished no purpose. The purpose might be accomplished by an order in council. How, for instance, does the minister function with respect to the engineer of the railway department and the employee of the marine department? What position do they occupy to-day? They have been going around the harbours giving instructions and directions. Under what authority?

Mr. HOWE: They were the commissioners, appointed by order in council.

Mr. BENNETT: Appointed by order in council to succeed the present commissioners. The same commissioners are commissioners for all the harbours, without regard to residence or anything of that sort; they are merely administering each of these harbours. That indicates the reason, I suppose: the question of who shall determine what men work in a harbour is more or less in the hands of these three gentlemen who are resident long distances away. Although long distance telephones are very useful, it is difficult to have Vancouver harbour entirely officered at the instance of the three men who are here. Therefore some one locally must determine that matter, and you get back to the same condition that you have had for years.

If the minister will look at the records and see the number of men that have been dismissed in Vancouver since October 23, he will find that the usual practice has prevailed, that whenever there has been a change of government there has been a change of personnel. If it is a new Conservative government that comes in, they insist on certain men losing their positions and those positions being filled by others; and when a Liberal government comes in, vice versa. Now one hoped, and I think the people hoped, that there was going to be a retention in the service of fit men. If it were desirable I could give the names of two or three such, regardless of their political complexion—some had no politics at all, but they were appointed within the last five years, and that in itself was held to be such a deterrent to their continued employment that they were let out of their positions. I put it to the minister that if the effect of this measure is merely that certain members of parliament are to say to the port manager: This man must go to work and the other man must

[Mr. Bennett.]

not go to work, depending entirely on their political views, the last state of this harbour is going to be worse than the first. That is a consideration that I do urge upon him; I think the public expects it to be regarded and it must be regarded if this bill is to become effective. The whole burden of one phase of Sir Alexander Gibb's report was the difficulty of making the operation of a port effective under political administration. No one suggests that all these positions should be filled by the civil service commission, but some effort should be made to secure men who have technical knowledge. For instance you have an acting manager at Saint John; you have a manager put in at Halifax. Each of these men may have admirable qualities, but his political associations are not unknown, and in the very nature of things he is supposed to give effect to the recommendations he receives. The same thing is true with respect to other parts of the country.

I can only urge the minister to realize that if we discuss the matter in this way it is not merely for the purpose of making political capital out of it, but with the earnest desire to see this experiment succeed. I am as anxious as the minister is to see it succeed, because it was the late government that asked Sir Alexander Gibb to come here; we discussed the matter with him fully; he went over it carefully and, realizing the difficulties, made his report after very mature consideration. If we are not to make any advance, but merely, as I say, to substitute the port manager for the former commissioners as the recipient of advice and to run the port as a purely political machine, then the very worst will follow instead of the best that we had hoped for.

Mr. HOWE: I find it rather difficult to discover the real position of my right hon. friend. In speaking to this bill the other day I was severely criticized by him for not giving the local managers more authority over hiring. I will read what he said about it:

The other day there was a snow-storm in Montreal.

I call attention to that line because that is the only line that is correct as far as I can discover.

The question of the removal of the snow was referred to Ottawa, as I am informed, and certain delays took place before the question was finally dealt with.

An hon. Member: No.

Mr. Bennett: I only know that those who were charged with responsibility in that port so informed me. There is no reason why this should not be known, and there were certain delays.